

**TITLE**

'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him': In the face of increased governor scrutiny and accountability, the extent to which the governing body maintains the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness in a Lancashire Catholic Secondary School.

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**‘This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him’: In the face of increased governor scrutiny and accountability, the extent to which the governing body maintains the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness in a Lancashire Catholic Secondary School.**

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**Dissertation in partial fulfilment of:**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores how governors, in the face of increased accountability from external measures (Ofsted, The Department for Education), maintain the balance between Catholic Distinctiveness and school improvement.

The research focuses on the following strands to help examine ways in which governors preserve and assure Ethos in faith schools;

- Catholic Distinctiveness
- The role of Governance
- The increased scrutiny/accountability placed on school leadership and governance
- Maintaining the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness

Following the literature reviewed, qualitative strategy was employed in the form of interviews with two Head teachers of Catholic High Schools, supported by quantitative methodology in the form of a questionnaire which was completed by the Governing Body of a Catholic High School.

The research findings were analysed in conjunction with the literature reviewed in order for me to reach conclusions. My research findings were used in my recommendations to the school, Archdiocese and Governing Body and focus on how school leaders can assure a balance between Catholic Distinctiveness and school improvement.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In September 2013 the Department for Education considered that the role of governance had possibly been undervalued consequently new accountability guidelines were introduced in Ofsted Inspections to recognise the vital role governing bodies play in the strategic direction and improvement of school across the country,

The Department for Education states that in all types of schools, governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;*
- b. Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and*
- c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.*

DfE 2014:5

These functions are reflected in regulations for maintained schools that came into force in September 2013 and in the criteria Ofsted inspectors use to judge the effectiveness of governance in both maintained schools and academies.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the governing body of a Catholic high school maintains the balance between Catholic Distinctiveness and school improvement in light of accountability measures.

### **1.2 Rationale**

Inspiration in this area evolved due to being a Deputy Head teacher at a Catholic High School for the last five years. During this time I have witnessed a significant shift in the content and quality of governor meetings. From my



experience, the preparation and planning by teachers and governors for sub-committee and full governing body meetings have notably increased; is this because of the need for understanding data in order to provide strategic direction? Is it due to the governors' core function of "holding the Head teacher to account" and governors' perception of this function? Ethos is not an agenda item however, results and achievement, finance and staff appointments are.

The rationale for this study is to find out if governors have changed their working attitude to Catholic education since new accountability measures from Ofsted and DfE and, if so, how do they continue to maintain the distinctiveness of the Catholic school in its pursuit of Catholic education for all? I would like to find out if the increased accountability is a change for the better and assisted in improving communication between governors and the Head teachers and senior leadership teams. Has it led to an increased presence of governors in school and what impact has this had? Are training opportunities more evident today and do governors feel more informed of their school's success – do they feel they have played a part in it? And lastly, how has this shift in focus influenced the Foundation governor's scrutiny of the Catholic dimension in school – do they ask more or less questions and do they feel more involved in the mission of the school?

### **1.3 Context: The Catholic High School**

This study will take place in an 11-16 mixed comprehensive Catholic High school in Lancashire. The school is covered by the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Due to a promotion, resignation, associate headship since 2012 the school has had a considerable movement in senior leadership; four head teachers.

It has successful GCSE results; above the national average for 5 or more A\* – C passes. Maths results are 7.5% above the national average and the school is above the national average for English by 16%. The brightest pupils perform especially well with 47.5 % achieving A\* and A grades compared to

the national average figure of 19%. In Chemistry, Physics, Biology, English Literature and ICT pupils achieve over 40% A\* and A grades.

There are 796 pupils on roll of whom 71% are baptised Catholic, with 28.25% from other Christian denominations and 0.75% from other world faith or religious traditions. Pupils drawn from associated Catholic primary schools in the pastoral area account for 89% of the roll. However, due to the strong ethos and emphasis on collective worship and inclusivity, you would be hard-pressed to identify who the non-Catholics were.

According to Raise Online<sup>1</sup> the school features in the lower percentile for SEN and Disadvantaged pupils in comparison to national average. The gap between PP pupils and non-PP is closing but not fast enough. School attendance levels are excellent and school exclusion rates are very low.

The school received a “Good” grading by Ofsted Section 5 Inspection in February 2014 and was given “Outstanding” by Liverpool Archdiocese Section 48 Inspection in March 2014.

In 2012 the head teacher who had significantly improved the achievement of the school whilst in post for eight years was promoted to a larger Catholic high school in another diocese. The governing body completed two rounds of recruitment and interview before they appointed a head teacher. The new head teacher who took up post in September 2012, resigned in June 2013 leaving the school in a very difficult and vulnerable position.

A retiring head teacher (from a local Catholic high school) was asked to be the Acting Head teacher for the interim period before a permanent replacement could be appointed. He was a very effective coach and servant leader; the school greatly benefitted from his expertise.

A head teacher was appointed in May 2014 and has made a significant positive impact on the school.

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted/Department for Education: Raise Online 2014 Summary Report, Production Date: 26 March 2015

Amidst the leadership crisis of 2012-13, the school admission number decreased from 165 pupils to 143. This downward trend continued in 2014/15 with admission number being significantly below with 137 pupils currently in year 7. This considerable drop in pupil numbers had a negative impact on the school budget with a deficit forecast if school admissions do not significantly increase for 2015/16.

Hence the governing body experienced a significant level of challenge and adversity which will be taken into account as this study develops.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

To help me achieve the aim of this project I will explore in the Literature Review what Catholic Distinctiveness is and how it manifests itself in Catholic leadership today. I will present a historical perspective on governance largely focusing upon the work of Dr Storr. Next, I will scrutinise statutory guidance from DfE, NGA and CES to determine the role of governance and the accountability introduced. Following this I will consider what constitutes effective governance and what this means for Catholic High Schools.

The Methodology Chapter will examine which research methods would be most appropriate to examine governor perceptions and opinions on the role they play in preserving ethos in school in the light of school improvement measures. Using fictitious names will conceal the identity of the schools used in the research and all the individuals involved will be assured that their responses will be in confidence and that the information will not be disclosed under any circumstances. The results of the research will be presented in tabular form in the Classification Chapter.

The Interpretation Chapter will connect the findings of the research data with the literature review. My Conclusion will include a series of recommendations which could be considered by the school, its Governing Body and the Archdiocese to help the future of Catholic school leadership to ensure the preservation of Catholic Distinctiveness in Catholic high schools.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an explanation of the purpose of the study, outline how the study will be conducted and presented. The following chapter will review the literature and prior research on Catholic school governance (mainly through the work of Dr Christopher Storr), Catholic Distinctiveness and explore the nature of school improvement and accountability.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In my introduction I explained the purpose of this study was to investigate, since the increased level of scrutiny and accountability on Governance from September 2012 by Ofsted and the DfE, how governance has changed and the extent to which this has impacted upon maintaining the balance between school improvement issues and Catholic distinctiveness in Wellside School.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore by reviewing previous research and literature, the key themes of my study; Catholic distinctiveness, Governance, increased scrutiny and school improvement issues.

Firstly, there will be an exploration what Catholic distinctiveness is.

Then will follow an explanation of Catholic education, governance and how it has historically developed (this section will largely be a review of the work of Storr 2012), then an examination of the role of governance nationally and a more focused look at the role of foundation governor and the guidance provided for individuals who choose to take on the voluntary role. Lastly there will be a review of the increased scrutiny, using DfE, Ofsted and other statutory guidance and legislation to examine the national expectations and the accountability measures placed upon governing bodies and schools to assist in measuring success.

Within the conclusion there will be a consideration of what is deemed “best” governor/most effective governance and what issues arise out of this which needs to be addressed in my research.

### **2.2 Catholic Distinctiveness**

#### **2.2.1 The significance of visible symbols**

I was once asked in an interview why should a Catholic school be given funds for development of a Local Authority initiative rather than the local comprehensive down the road – what makes it different? I must admit, at the time, I found the question challenging to answer. Even though we work within

Catholic schools, school leaders sometimes find it difficult to articulate what distinctiveness is. In the preamble in *Christ at the Centre*, it agrees that 'distinctiveness' and 'ethos' despite being 'common currency' they are 'seldom defined' (2005:2). The local comprehensive down the road from Wellside School achieves excellent results, it embraces local community projects, offers facility hire and creates business partnership to improve the opportunities for its' pupils. So too does Wellside School: the school used in this study. Nevertheless, what makes Wellside School, a Catholic school, different or distinctive?

*Christ at the Centre*, within its fundamental characteristics of what makes a Catholic school distinctive states,

Uphold the dignity of the human person through the maintenances and care of school buildings and, through external and internal symbols and displays (2005:6)

The idea of, 'outward signs of inward grace' feature here in seeking to define distinctiveness.

When I have conducted interviews for appointments at Wellside School, I have asked the 'ethos question' – what do you understand to be the ethos of a Catholic school and how would you be able to contribute? The frequent answer has always referred to the statues, crucifixes and religious pictures. Visible, tangible signs and objects are the things people see first; they send a visual message the visitor that the Catholic school is different.

Further, visible icons can help provide focus and support during an assembly or classroom act of collective worship. The celebration of the Eucharist, presence of a school chaplain and chaplaincy team or the celebration of a Mission Week all contribute to the ethos of the school and the relationships between parish, home and school – all of which consolidate distinctiveness.

The sociologist Peter Berger says that every society has a "plausibility structure." What is a plausibility structure? It is a culturally shared reality that determines what a given society will accept as plausible—

whether or not it is believable or makes any sense. (cited in Waldecker 2006:1)

Berger argues that something is plausible if there are visible signs or symbols of it – it becomes reality and therefore acceptable. A Lay Chaplain or enough Catholic staff who model the Catholic faith shows there is a visible commitment to it hence, considering Berger's view, there is a plausibility structure to a Catholic school which contributes to the distinctiveness. The outward signs maintain the plausibility of the shared reality/belief which is the common thread of faith.

Fincham states,

Catholic schools have a distinctive religious character and offer a philosophy of education that is based on faith (2013: online – The Pastoral Review)

Catholic faith is based upon the Gospel values; love, patience, respect. It is these values along with the desire to call out the charism of every individual, which give Catholic schools their distinctiveness. It is the thread of the mission that keeps the fabric of the school together.

Education as defined in the Oxford Dictionary (Concise Oxford Dictionary Seventh Edition 1982) as

Educating, being educated; systematic (course of) instruction; development of character or mental powers

Thus, if education is concerned with the system of instruction and development of character, Catholic education is also concerned with how pupils learn and how the curriculum is developed and taught to meet the needs of everyone.

Christ at the Centre states that a Catholic school should,

Put Christ at the centre of everything it does by integrating Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church into every aspect of learning, teaching and the totality of school life. (2005:5)

Therefore Catholic education is distinctive as it is education for the soul. Rather than education being a means in which to pass on knowledge, Catholic education and Catholic schools are distinctive as they ensure that each child experiences not only an educational journey, but also experience a 'journey of faith' (Christ at the Centre 2005:5).

As Bishop Stock insists in order to be "education for the soul" Christ must be "the foundation of the whole educational enterprise. (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE] 1977:34). In order for such a high ideal to be realised in practice the sacramental perspective, which, in essence, constitutes a commitment on the part of staff to model their ministry on that of Christ, should be a central feature of the Catholic school.

### **2.2.2 The Sacramental Perspective**

The sacramental perspective constitutes the central feature of Catholic distinctiveness. Within the context of Catholic education this means that all teachers, including school leaders and governors should model their lives on Christ. School leaders/governors/teachers are visible signs of the presence of Christ. Thus, as Osbourne (1993 cited in Lydon 2013: 2.3 M3 Booklet) states; all Christian ministry has its origin and purpose in the life of Jesus.

The key theme within the sacramental perspective is that all who work in schools are called to model their ministry on Jesus. Thus, for the Catholic leader the task is one of service, to lead by serving others. "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Furthermore, if Jesus' ministry is to be modelled by teachers/school leaders then the idea of how Jesus is present with his disciples needs to be considered. Jesus' relationships with the disciples is likened to a covenant – the care of the shepherd and the interrelation between the shepherd and the sheep; a symbiotic one. Likewise, the relationship between school leaders/governors and pupils/staff/parents should be deemed the same – an interdependence; a relationship which becomes stronger the more each element needs the other. In practice, this can be seen in how school leaders look to empower others and have the



desire to enable others to develop their potential rather than putting themselves first.

Moreover, Jesus' ministry encapsulates the idea of community or "the call to form a community" (Lydon 2013:2.8 M3 booklet). And so, implicit in Catholic education is a commitment to collegiality. All Catholics should work together for the common good and the mission of the school. In an unpublished lecture delivered to Catholic Deputy Headteachers Conference at LACE, Liverpool, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon said, 'Catholic education creates links, it builds communities and it creates connections'. He stated that it is these connections which enable creativity and develop an understanding of each other which allows Catholic schools to transform hearts (June 2015).

Lastly, the idea of challenge within Jesus' ministry must be considered in terms of school leadership. Discipleship was a challenge; the young men left their nets and fishing boats immediately and joined Jesus, they left a secure lifestyle for an unknown future. And so, in Catholic distinctiveness the idea of challenge with the appropriate level of support (just like Jesus) is seen as a strength and one in which Catholic school leaders create environments in which allow others to take risks, make mistakes and develop their growth mind-set in order to reach their full potential.

### **2.2.3 A Holistic Perspective**

Pope Benedict XVI in his address to the Big Assembly at St Mary's University College in 2010 acknowledged;

A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students become saints. (Pope Benedict XVI: 2010)

The important aspect of Catholic education is how it develops young people in giving them the skills to survive modern society. In helping students become saints we are not expecting them to be the next Pope but grow to be a morally connected individual whose opinions, behaviours and relations with

others are modelled on Christ. And so, Catholic education is based upon values and truths of the Catholic faith.

In helping students become saints, teachers need focus upon the individual as well as subject content or curriculum driven targets. Indeed, school results and progress are very important in determining the success of a school (and its future), however, it is *how* the success is achieved, through a holistic view of education and a transmission of values (Fincham 2013) rather than a box-ticking exercise.

Catholic distinctiveness is pupil-centred education. So, for example, from my professional experience; we have a small group of KS4 pupils who follow a bespoke curriculum which includes the core subjects and one vocational qualification which is studied at an external vocational college. This curriculum covers four days study, for the remaining day the pupils attend a work placement. Indeed, we have managed for some pupils to attend two day work placement. When Ofsted have visited twice (2010, 2014) on both occasions they have questioned the expected progress of these pupils against the national averages. We have explained that these pupils struggle with school; emotionally and behaviourally, either because they lack the social skills to cope with the busy day or do not have parental support at home. We ensure these pupils attend a course which engages them and gives them hope for their future. Many of the pupils' destinations have been apprenticeships from successful work placements or college courses at a level appropriate to them, many of them are now in full time employment. Even though this provision may not meet the demands of the state - it meets the needs of those pupils. Indeed, our value added scores are affected, but it ensures that those pupils receive an education which is suited to them; they are supported by caring staff and given confidence to journey into adulthood.

#### **2.2.4 The Significance of the School's Mission**

Distinctiveness is found in a Catholic school's mission. The school mission statement is the fundamental basis for a Catholic school. It helps define what

the school's purpose is and what the school is about. The distinctiveness of a Catholic school is concerned with the *how* and the *why* rather than the *what*.

A school's mission and character do not develop by themselves; they are formed through daily action, not by discussion alone, and every member of school or college community can contribute to their development and enrichment (CES 1999: 11)

And so, how students, staff, governors and parents conduct themselves throughout the day in and out of lessons promotes mission and grace. How the individuals react to one another and treat each other within the school community helps maintain a Catholic identity. Grace (2002:8) speaks of a mission integrity and defines it as; 'fidelity in practice and not just in public rhetoric,' and; 'the people within an organisation can be seen to be living and practising the principles of the mission statement and not simply publishing them in a prospectus' (2010:11).

Distinctiveness is permeated through the idea that the values of a Catholic school are not just referred to in words but also actions, as Francis of Assisi said, Catholic schools must: 'Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words' (quoted in Fincham 2013). Ultimately, a Catholic school needs to practise what it preaches – and sometimes, this is difficult to measure and maintain.

Wellside School's Mission Statement;

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"

We stand for a rich Catholic tradition which is based on the Gospels and in the person and teaching of Jesus who is the fullest expression of mankind. We recognise and endeavour to serve the needs of all members of the school community – academic, spiritual, moral, social and physical. We acknowledge in particular the needs of those who are disadvantaged in any way. We value the importance of fostering and developing the potential of each person in justice and equality and in educating each pupil as a whole person, made in the image

and likeness of God. We encourage all of them to accept a curriculum, which is challenging of contemporary society and to play their part in it. We believe in the pursuit of excellence, not only in academic studies, but in all that has to do with life.

Even though this is a lengthy Mission statement it is one in which the school recognises the need to address and nurture the uniqueness and dignity of the individual. Further it acknowledges the core purpose of Catholic education; provision for the poor in which it emphasises those who are 'disadvantaged in any way'.

Moreover, Catholic education is distinctive in the way it serves society and assists in cultural identity and community cohesion. Indeed Grace in his research concerning Catholic leaders and mission integrity stated,

The majority of these school leaders took the view that the Catholic secondary school had, in practice, become the 'living church' for the majority of Catholic youth in England. (2002:446)

Faith schools provide the pastoral link between home, parish and family. They make a significant contribution to the development of society; by building morals and principles. In this context, Catholic education contributes to social cohesion. Faith schools support parishes and families in helping form the faith education of young people. This collaborative approach to faith formation helps young people understand the world around them; accept diversity, share common values for the common good and ultimately become confident citizens. The Catholic Herald website specified,

In 2012 the Statistical Yearbook of the Church reported worldwide Church figures as of December 31, 2012. By the end of 2012, the worldwide Catholic population had reached 1.228 billion, an increase of 14 million or 1.14 per cent, slightly outpacing the global population growth rate, which, as of 2013, was estimated at 1.09% (2014)

And so, as the Catholic population evidently grows young people see their schools as their Church – a sanctuary and a place to address the faith

imperative. Catholic schools offer community and security for all members of the family – not just young people.

The important part for distinctiveness for Catholic education is to ensure it can translate the traditions of the faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and apply it to modern secular society.

### **2.2.5 Staff Development**

In an unpublished lecture given to MA students in January 2015, Sullivan stated that the ‘business’ of Catholic education was ‘learning to love, learning to listen’. Within this concept is the idea that in order to love we need to recognise our vulnerability and in acknowledging our weaknesses we are more likely to be in touch with a deeper dimension and therefore improve our decision-making processes.

Therefore, staff development provides a major focus in maintaining a Catholic distinctiveness within a school. I do not suggest whole school CPD on Catholic Distinctiveness, which can be useful when re-addressing the mission statement, but professional development focussed on the person and individual need rather than task or strategy. In *Tweak to Transform* Hughes (2002:225) believes that in developing people individually then change will happen quickly. It is developing the individual and, in Sullivan’s terms, assisting them in recognising their weaknesses and vulnerabilities which will ultimately strengthen their souls and deepen their perception of vocation and service to the school’s mission.

All schools have national guidelines – Wellside School is no different. All staff have to adhere to the Teachers’ Professional Standards, even more so now performance-related pay has been introduced. However, if we apply Sullivan’s idea of sublation; the holy is something encountered in the ordinary- to take something already there and place it in a higher plane in order to enhance its meaning – then teaching in Catholic education sublates professionalism.

Within Catholic education, the skills, knowledge and curriculum tasks involved in being a teacher are enhanced by the idea of vocation. Staff in Catholic schools must see the bigger picture and allow the ordinary to become the extraordinary to serve the common good and in doing so, the distinctive character of the school is maintained.

The same can be applied to Catholic school governance. Governors of Catholic schools need to hold strong decision-making skills, and so with Sullivan's idea in mind, governors need to consider how the statutory guidelines and restraints will direct them in serving the school and the common good. This will be explored further within the theme of governance in Catholic schools.

### **2.2.6 Distinctiveness in a Governors World?**

To define distinctiveness can be a daunting challenge for many school leaders today. The existence of visible signs can encourage all to practise their faith and serve as a physical reminder but it is the mission in action which makes Catholic schools different.

A community centred on gospel values which permeates into every aspect of the school is what makes a school distinctive. How the school supports its parents, parishes, staff, pupils and every person in the faith community shows how different it is.

From ensuring the curriculum is appropriate for each individual so individual gifts can be shared and celebrated to the way in which the staff act out the mission statement in their everyday lives is all important. As the guidance from the Archdiocese of Liverpool says, 'Catholic education is different in the way it addresses the core purpose of a Catholic school in teaching and learning about the faith' (2012:19) – in deed and if necessary, in word.

Storr (2011:156) acknowledges two aspects of Catholic distinctiveness; outward and inward. Outward aspects are those addressed previously. The inward signs are those not so easily seen but definitely felt; the values and truths (the importance of conscience and faithfulness), relationships, the

mission integrity of all, the concept of vocation and the integral development of the human person. The entire above are derived from a communion with Christ (Konstant 1981:87).

Academic education as a means and not an end features strongly in Catholic school distinctiveness. Grace explains that,

.....intelligence, talents and skills and command of knowledge are to be developed to the highest possible degree but always with a religious and moral understanding that such a personal empowerment it is to be used for the benefit of others (2002: 431)

And so, the idea that Catholic education breeds not only intelligence, skills and talents (which effectively all schools nationally should do) but nutrition for the soul, encapsulates the holistic approach canonised in Vatican documents.

The question now is how governors ensure the moral and religious understanding is maintained when the responsibilities of educational leadership and governance are 'qualitatively different' (Grace 2002:432) for those of educational school management and the dictations from the state?

Grace (2002:432) speaks of 'mission integrity' - fidelity in practice and not just in public rhetoric to the distinctive and authentic principles of a Catholic education - which is continually challenged by performance indicators and accountability measures. Do governors feel their ability to protect the mission is in jeopardy now increased pressures of school academic success are in the spotlight?

The purpose of governance and the role it plays in Catholic education will now be explored.

### **2.3 Catholic Education and Governance**

In order to establish a thorough understanding of governance it is necessary to provide a historical perspective on governance.

Research on school governance especially Catholic school governance is sparse. A research study into Catholic school governance was conducted by Dr Christopher Storr in 2011 entitled, '*Serving Two Masters? Catholic School Governance at Work*'. The work of Storr constitutes the principal source of a retrieval of governance development and accountability since the 1800's.

### **2.3.1 Governance: A Historical Perspective**

Catholic schools for the poor were in existence by 1760 (Storr 2011: 3). The first Relief Act of 1778 enabled English Catholics to provide a religious education for their children. In fact, even in these early days schools encountered the initial signs of Section 48 inspections and accountability; as in 1816 the ACC (Associated Catholic Charities of the Metropolis) set up a Commission to investigate the running of its schools to examine the rewards, uniformity of instruction, Holydays, prayers, religious education and exercises. The Commission concluded that the provision of schools for Roman Catholics was inadequate.

Catholic schools were funded by the Church or other voluntary sources; parishes or sponsors, not the state, meanwhile the National Society (with 80% grant funding from government) provided the majority of funds for Church of England schools.

Furthermore, contributing to the inadequate provision in Catholic schools was the rapid increase of the Catholic population in England in 1830's/40's due to the mass immigration of Irish Catholic communities who were fleeing Ireland due to the potato famine. These large Catholic families needed housing, work and above all, education.

Storr states,

There was belief that the Irish immigrants of this period posed social and political threat.....The fear was that the Irish might combine with the English working classes and seriously threaten the state (2011:10)

Irish immigration was a catalyst in the improvement the quality of Catholic education in England in two ways; firstly, the state recognised that the



schooling of these children could not be left to voluntary sources and that public money had to be found. Secondly, that the Catholic Church was the body responsible for educating the Catholic poor hence grant aid was made available to Catholic schools in 1847.

Unfortunately, some schools refused the grant aid due to fear of state interference (a common thread throughout) but the silver lining of the introduction of grant aid funding was that Catholic school management emerged; a School Board was needed to oversee the funding and to ensure the school was run effectively (a pseudo-inspection body).

Storr (2011:18) explains how the 1860's saw the further development of management boards who oversaw government grants and conducted their schools in accordance with a trust deed whose terms, at this point, were dictated by the state.

Nevertheless, finance was still a problem and there was a growing inequality between Catholic education and those of state/board schools. Storr (2011:21) describes, despite the state grant aid, Catholic schools were still the poor relative; hardship in Catholic schools across England was well documented. Inspections led by the Cross Commission in 1888 reported that staff were underpaid in comparison to their Church of England counterparts, that there was insufficient staff and a general lack of food and education. However one glimmer of positivity was the nature of the relationships between teachers and managers,

There is more personal contact between managers in voluntary than in board schools. They take more interest in the schools and in the children (Cross Commission Report 1888: 599 cited in Storr 2011:22)

The recognition of relationships as a strength in Catholic school management is raised here. The Commission praised the voluntary sector for its strong relationships and indeed concluded that two styles for the management of schools was needed; management conducted from a distance and management which consisted of more personal support – an early indication of the separation of Local Authority direction and that of Governing Bodies. In

1894 the Royal Commission offered the 'best methods of establishing a well-organised system of secondary education' and so,

The Commission did not think that new local education authorities should supervise 'the details of administration which form a large part of the duties of the governing body of a school', but that governing bodies should be 'independent of the local authority' (cited in Storr 2011:24)

Catholic schools modelled how governing bodies were intended – a close personal contact to advise and support, to be independent – and allow the LA or state to do the rest.

With the Education Act 1891 making all education free, finance became an increasing problem in Catholic education and so, in return for further public funding, the bishops proposed that about a third of school managers could be nominated by the council – hence the introduction of Local Authority Governors on the Catholic school Governing Body. The serving two master's territory for Catholic education had begun.

Along with the shared management role of voluntary (Catholic) sector schools came more clarity for management committees. Additions to the 1902 Act saw the first reference to 'governors' on 1903/4 Regulations (Storr 2011:28) and then in 1908 a model Article of Government was issued. The article outlined the early purpose and function of the governing body;

- The composition of the governing body
- The appointment and dismissal of assistant teachers
- The powers and responsibilities of the headmaster or headmistress
- The relations of the governing body to the LEA in respects of finance

From 1902 to 1944 Storr reports little change except that finance remained a problem (2011: 29). In 1943 the White Paper: Educational Reconstruction proposed all secondary schools should have a governing body. New

Instruments of Government were issued for secondary voluntary schools and within this time Storr states, 'the LEA's got more or less what they wanted' (2011:31). Schools were given greater autonomy for pupil admissions, buildings, staffing and equipment and over the next twenty years were incredibly involved in addressing these issues.

In the 1960's the overhaul of the Catholic Church with Vatican II and the necessity to re-group the faith in order to preserve it for modern society took place. Storr states,

The new vision of the Church was of a pilgrim body in which each individual had a unique vocation, and where laity were called upon to exercise their skills and talents in spreading the Gospel (2011:32)

And so the influence of the clergy in the governing body of Catholic schools evolved and the influence of the laity in the management of schools shifted. As the Royal Commission reported in 1966, they had ample evidence about the 'unsatisfactory nature of school governance' (Storr 2011: 34)

Thus with the onset of Vatican II, re-organisation of teacher training in the 1960's and the call to address governance, it was suggested introducing parents and teachers to a governing body may improve its function. In amending the Instrument of Government in 1968, meant inclusion of laity in school governing bodies as Storr expresses,

The important point to note at this stage is that it strengthened the growing view that education was too important to be left in the hands of the educationists (2011: 36)

The 1980 Education Act made significant changes to the composition of governing bodies and initiated the necessary recruitment of many foundation governors by the dioceses.

From 1980 onwards powers and responsibilities of the governing body grew from merely pupil admissions to staff appointments/dismissals/suspensions and, if grant-maintained (another contentious issue), responsibility for the schools budget.

There are clear themes emerging from examining the historical perspective of governance; how the power and responsibilities of school leaders, governors and managers 'waxed and waned' (Storr 2011:43). That tension continues to exist between the Church and successive governments (rooted in faith but highlighted through funding) and the extent of government control over Catholic schools.

### **2.3.2 The National Perspective on the Role and Function of Effective Governing Bodies**

From the mid 1980's onwards there has been significant increase in the guidance and advice for Governors. It is understandable, if governors are to become more accountable, that guidance and information about what constitutes an effective governor needs to be clear.

Scanlon (cited in Storr 2011: 82) concluded that there was as strong link between effective schools and effective governance. Within his work, *'Improving the Effectiveness of School Governing Bodies'*, Scanlon identified ten factors which contributed to an effective governing body. Ofsted added to this list in 2001 by *'Making It Better: Improving School Governance'* publication which outlined key characteristics for successful governing bodies. This guidance started the ball rolling for frequent Ofsted releases over the following years on the role of governance and in the 2003 Handbook for Inspections, specific references were outlined to inspectors to evaluate the impact of governance. The accountability and scrutiny placed upon governance will be summarised later.

Within the Governor Handbook (2014), the DfE states the core functions of governing bodies are;

- a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- b. Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff;
- c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money well spent

These functions are reflected in the criteria Ofsted inspectors use to judge the effectiveness of governance which will be addressed later.

Furthermore effective governance includes the following aspects (taken from National Governors' Association (NGA) guidance);

- a. The right people around the table; do governors have the appropriate skills and commitment to challenge a school?
- b. A strong understanding of the role of governance – being in a strategic yet supportive role and all the responsibility this brings
- c. Appointing a good chairperson who will lead and manage the group
- d. Appointing a high quality clerk who will advise the governing body on the nature of their functions and duties
- e. Having an understanding of the school; its context not only in relation to Ofsted and data but its effectiveness within the community and in relation to other schools
- f. A commitment to ask challenging questions
- g. Being confident in having courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people

Within the DfE's Governors Handbook (09:2014) it stresses the importance of the strategic role of the governor. It advises 'avoid routine involvement in operational matters' (2014:10) and 'set the schools strategic framework and ensure statutory duties are met' (2014:9). Furthermore, guidance also emphasises that governors strategy should focus on challenge and opportunities for school improvement. Thus, the governor role is one of orchestrator; knowing a little about a lot but enough to guide, advise and support others.

DfE guidance also acknowledges the necessity of the governing body to 'set and safeguard a schools ethos of high expectations of everyone in the school community' (2014:9). This mirrors the Church's approach to education; a standards driven one. The governing body are responsible for 'setting' and protecting ethos in terms of high standards for individuals; therefore within

Catholic education, governors need to ensure a spiritual education is accessible alongside an academic one.

Moreover,

‘Foundation governors, such as those appointed by a church or diocese, have a specific role in preserving and developing the ethos of the school, including any religious character’ (DfE 2014:9)

The interesting aspect within this paragraph is the idea of ‘preserving’ the ethos as it assumes a foundation governor can recognise and demonstrate ethos of a religious character. The difficulty of articulating distinctiveness and ethos was examined in an earlier section – how do we know foundation governors have an understanding of mission and ethos? Within national directives, governors are expected to ‘develop the ethos’; however, has there been any research on what governors’ perception of ethos and religious character is?

During an ‘Effective Governance’ seminar in February 2015, Baroness Estelle Morris suggested effective governance is centred around strategic planning which is based upon morals, values and principles rather than accountability. The first and obvious reason for this would be the frequent policy changes and DfE directives over the last three to five years – avoids strategically planning as the educational landscape changes so quickly. However, the idea that governing bodies base their strategies and school development plans on an individual schools ambitions, values and local community makes sense. As such, an effective governing body needs to have not only a statistical knowledge of the school but also an understanding of the community in which the school sits. These two aspects coupled with morality and human values culminates in effective and realistic school improvement planning; know your school, know your staff and know your kids.

Baroness Morris continued to state that, ‘effective school governance relies upon the quality of people from the top to the bottom of the organisation, the right people with the right skills in the right places’ (February 2015).

Consequently, when in the DfE Handbook it mentions effective governance improves the school performance 'by asking the right questions', the right questions have to be asked by the right people at the right time. How can this be assured?

This idea is echoed by John Sullivan's work when he speaks of rhetorical approach versus a coherent approach towards leadership in Catholic schools. In an unpublished lecture at Blessed John Henry Newman College in February 2015, Sullivan explained the idea of contingency; when an individual can be selective in conveying certain messages or truths to others in order to maintain inclusiveness, in contrast to the coherency or firmness approach (the truth – how it is) in which an individual needs to be strictly logical. Keeping the balance of these two approaches is fundamental to effective leadership or governance. Storr identifies with this idea when he states,

Governors bring to their work – and indeed, are expected to do – a distillation of the totality of their life experience, including, amongst other things, their own education, their employment, their marital status, their position and role in the community, and their personal responses to the social and cultural mores of the society in which they live; in other words, all the ingredients that make up their own personal identities' (2011:64)

The role of the governing body is also to hold the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school. Hence the governing body need to have a robust understanding of the vast amount of data available. Ofsted produces a school performance data dashboard which is a snapshot of the school performances nationally. Unfortunately, the data on which this dashboard is based does become out-of-date fairly rapidly therefore the onus is upon the head teacher to ensure relevant information is regularly available and succinctly presented to governors. Interestingly, ethos and mission do not feature in governor data dashboards. How can governors be assured that ethos and mission are being developed alongside academic excellence in the Catholic school?

Lastly, the DfE handbook stressed how the role of the governing body is 'responsible for making sure their schools money is well spent' (2014:16). Again, asking the right questions at the right time is fundamental. Governors need to assure themselves of the finance details, funding and budget spreadsheets from the business manager in being well informed so the correct financial decision can be made at the appropriate time.

In guidance provided by the DfE and National Governors Association it is clear that the role of the governor nationally is one of strategy, accountability and finance. Yet governors are volunteers, they undertake the role of governor with no pay are expected to act out the role within the principles of public life (DfE 2014:18).

Apart from the reference to preservation of ethos, the above guidelines do not take into account the distinct nature of a Catholic school and how this influences the way a Catholic school is led and governed. Now, using documentation from the Liverpool Archdiocese and the Catholic Education Service (CES), there will be an examination of the specific role of the foundation governor.

### **2.3.3 The Role of the Foundation Governor**

Within Governor Training and Support document<sup>2</sup>, it states;

The core purpose of a Catholic school is teaching and learning about the faith. Everything that happens in a school must contribute effective teaching and learning. Governors must keep this at the front of all their meetings. Do not allow yourselves to be diverted by other issues (2012:9).

If the national expectation on the role of governance is the provide strategic direction, place accountability on the head teacher and ensure a school is value for money then within the role of foundation governor comes into force when addressing 'safeguarding a school ethos'.

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<sup>2</sup> Archdiocese of Liverpool, Governor Guidance (2012)'The Newly Appointed Governor or the Governor Commencing a New Term of Office'



In 2014, the CES created a working party to disseminate best practice for foundation governors (FG) and created useful guidance in which provide a comprehensive role description (2015). Within the FG role description it states the legal and additional key responsibilities.

Legal responsibilities mirror the DfE guidance concerning 'preservation and maintenance of the Catholic character of the school' (2015:1) and ensuring the school carries out its' legal duties in accordance with the Trust Deed. Further addition to legal responsibility includes the FG ensuring the religious education curriculum is in accordance with the Bishops Conferences' RE Curriculum Directory.

Within the additional key responsibilities it clearly states, 'to always act in accordance with the mind of the bishop (and Religious Superior) and, 'to ensure that Gospel values and the Catholic faith permeate every aspect of life at the school' (2015:1). This reflects the sacramental perspective in action; school leaders and governors modelling their lives (and minds) on Christ.

The guidance continues to outline how the FG must adhere to the admission arrangements and appointment of teachers to Catholic schools (responsibilities linked back to the early management of Catholic schools in the 1800's). Lastly, the role description maintains,

You **must** ensure that the curriculum of the school is rooted in an understanding of life in conformity with the teaching of the Gospel and the Catholic Church (2014:3).

The CES provide further guidance in the form of a Fact Sheet for those interested in becoming a governor in a Catholic school. As well as reiterating the DfE three core functions it expands on the FG role by stating that the role is, 'specifically appointed by the Bishop...to ensure preservation and development of the school's Catholic character' (2014:2). It also understandably states, 'you **must** be a practising Catholic' (2014:2).

From the recent guidance from CES it is clear the CES have been proactive in addressing recruitment of Foundation governors. The FG is crucial with the governing body(GB) of a Catholic school as this individual, as a practising Catholic, is responsible for reminding the GB of the school mission in its strive for excellence. How does the FG see their role within the GB – one of service - or possibly a role in financial management and support? Or the governor who shares and leads collective worship? Do they feel skilled enough to draw upon their experiences and their faith?

CES visibly summarise that the FG need to be able to articulate what they feel they are able to contribute to the Catholic life of the school (2014:2) and so a commitment to the faith and a visible contribution to parish/community life is essential. The aspect of mission in action is crucial here, FG need to be able to model their faith in a manner in which others wish to follow. How is this addressed in Catholic schools today?

It is important to note that the CES welcomes individuals ‘from all backgrounds’ (2015:2) to volunteer to be a FG. This indicates within the sacramental perspective on the invitational nature of Jesus’ mission. Jesus’ ministry is not addressed to an elite group. Likewise as the CES welcomes all backgrounds, it acknowledges that people with different life experiences come with a different set of skills and knowledge; Catholic school governing bodies need to have a wide breadth of skills to draw upon in order to be efficient and effective.

Hence, the person(s) responsible for ensuring the distinctiveness are the FG,

The Trustees of the Diocese appoint their representatives to each governing body - the foundation governors and they must ensure that the distinctive character and purpose of the Catholic School is upheld.  
(Archdiocese Guidance 2012:6)

The following quotation from Cardinal Hume sums up very clearly the role and expectation of the Foundation Governor,

To be a governor of a Catholic School is to be involved in the mission of the Church because our Catholic schools are a very important part of our work for young people in the Church. I believe profoundly in our Catholic Schools and the Governors are there to make quite certain that the Catholic character of the School is maintained and forwarded. That is, in terms of teaching the Catholic faith and ensuring that the whole atmosphere is, in fact, Catholic; a good Catholic community. But it is also very important our Catholic schools should be first class schools, giving an excellent education. This means the realising of the potential of every pupil, high academic standards, good vocational training and the development of the whole of the young person; preparing them for adult life. In all of this, the governors play a key role, a very important role. (Taken from Governor Training and Support: The Newly Appointed Governor, Archdiocese of Liverpool Guidance Sept 2012)

## **2.4 Emerging Scrutiny and Accountability on Governance and School Improvement**

Governance is about overseeing the success of the school. It is about agreeing priorities and monitoring progress towards them. It is not about running or managing the school or college – that is the job of paid professionals. Governance is about providing constructive support and challenge to leaders and managers to enable them to do their job to the best of their ability. Strong governance is becoming all the more essential as schools and colleges become more autonomous. (NGA website Feb 2015)

From examining the historical perspective on the emergence of school management and evolution of governance there is no doubt that tensions remain between the state and the Church. In the past it was clear to see that Catholic education seemed to be the poor relative to state education and

Catholic education needed the financial intervention of the state in order to survive.

However, therein lay the price; local authority/government interference or directives have existed since. The term “interference’ may be somewhat negative; nevertheless, could the notion of partnership also fail to describe the relationship between Catholic schools and government initiative?

Sullivan (2015 – unpublished lecture) pointed out that Catholic distinctiveness is compromised by the pursuit of school improvement as he potentially equates the managerialism of school leadership with the negative connotations of raising standards.

And yet, there is a significance of standards in the context of Catholic distinctiveness. The stated aim behind most of the Government’s recent policy changes is a desire to drive up academic standards. The adoption of a standards-driven political agenda reflects the Church’s own approach towards education, as the Bishops of England and Wales reminded us last year:

The Catholic Church in England and Wales is rightly proud of the high academic standards achieved in so many Catholic schools. However it is aware that some schools fall short of the standard expected by both Government and Church (cf. Can. 806 §2). Therefore the Bishops' Conference mandates the CES to develop strategies alongside Diocesan authorities and within the wider Catholic sector to ensure that Catholic Schools in difficulty can be helped to improve rapidly so as to offer an excellent Catholic education to our children.<sup>3</sup>

Pope recognised the connection between the drive for standards in education agenda and the strive for excellence in the Catholic school when he stated,

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<sup>3</sup> Pope, G., (2013), Presentation at INCE, London, Institute of Education Unpublished Paper:3

Our aim is to ensure that our schools excel not only in the spiritual life which they offer to our children, but also in the academic success which they provide.

We've now established a Standards Working Group chaired by Dr Anne Bamford. It is recognition that we do not necessarily hold the expertise centrally but rather call on the expertise in the world of Catholic education. Our role is sometimes one of leadership and providing a strong voice for Catholic education and sometimes it is one of facilitation and support. (2013: in a Presentation at INCE, Unpublished Paper; 3)

Education is a transient process; not only for the individual experiencing it, but those who lead within it. The legislation landscape changes; new governments introduce new policies and procedures and different measures and academic goal posts are placed on schools.

Within the last ten years the Ofsted Framework for Inspection has been amended more than a twenty times. There has been a complete overhaul of the National Curriculum, the academisation of schools along with the introduction of free schools and a restructuring of the Schools Inspectorate. This rapid activity can lead to confusion, but the fundamental fact remains; the importance of education. Education is now more important than ever before. It is comparable internationally and, despite austerity measures, more money is spent on education than before (Morris 2015). Thus, scrutiny within education is inevitable as impact of increased funding needs to be accounted for – and so, if a governor's function is to ensure financial performance then scrutiny has to be expected.

In 2001 Ofsted initially recognised the importance of governance in leading schools when it identified a list of characteristics which made an effective governing body. In 2003 and 2005 it introduced specific references to the inspection of effectiveness of governance. In 2005 the role of the governing body was given high profile especially with the introduction of the SEF (School Evaluation Form) and the expected governance involvement in the statutory completion of the self-evaluation tool for schools. Ofsted inspection

arrangement up until 2012 required the SEF to be completed prior to inspection.

The 2015 Ofsted guidance (January 2015 amendments – paragraphs 72 & 73) Framework for Inspection states,

- Inspectors will expect governors to know about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Inspectors will expect school governors to be familiar with, and understand, performance data, including the information that the school data dashboard presents for their school.
- The contribution of governors to the school is evaluated as part of the judgement on leadership and management. As with the meetings between inspectors and pupils, parents and staff, meetings with governors should take place without the presence of the head teacher or senior staff.

And further, listing from paragraph 165, what inspector will expect governors to know,

- carry out their statutory duties, such as safeguarding, and understand the boundaries of their role as governors
- ensure that they and the school promote tolerance of and respect for people of all faiths (or those of no faith), races, genders, ages, disability and sexual orientations (and other groups with protected characteristics) and support and help, through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community, to prepare children and young people positively for life in modern Britain
- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction, including long-term planning (for example, succession)
- contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses, including the quality of teaching, and reviewing the impact of their own work
- understand and take sufficient account of pupil data, particularly their understanding and use of the school data dashboard

- assure themselves of the rigour of the assessment process
- are aware of the impact of teaching on learning and progress in different subjects and year groups
- provide challenge and hold the head teacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety, including by using the data dashboard, other progress data, examination outcomes and test results; or whether they (As defined by the Equality Act 2010 School inspection handbook January 2015 , No. 120101) hinder school improvement by failing to tackle key concerns or developing their own skills
- use the pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics
- ensure solvency and probity and that the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively
- are providing support for an effective head teacher
- monitor performance management systems and understand how the school makes decisions about teachers' salary progression , including the performance management of the head teacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management
- engage with key stakeholders; ensure they are transparent and accountable, including in terms of recruitment of staff, governance structures, attendance at meetings, and contact with parents and carers.(2015:47&48)

It is a daunting list of key aspects which sensibly link to the DfE core functions of strategy, vision and finance. From the Ofsted criteria it is clear that the scrutiny placed on governor is to 'ensure' and 'assure' that the schools vision and priorities are sustained with transparency and accountability. In doing so, the GB needs to engage, contribute, monitor and, importantly, understand the school's data within the boundaries of their role - all in a voluntary capacity.

Interestingly, it states how the GB need to 'provide challenge and hold the head teacher to account' and yet 'provide support for an effective head teacher' – therein lies a challenge whereby Catholic distinctiveness in the power of relationships can emerge. Hence, the need for a skilled GB with strong interpersonal skills or HR background is necessary but also an understanding of the deeper skills needed when supporting a Catholic head teacher in a Catholic school – how can this be maintained?

As mentioned in the criteria the governor strengths (and weaknesses) are inspected under the Leadership and Management aspect of the school. If the inspector feels the governance is weak a review of governance can be recommended and so the pressure to perform and excel, even as a volunteer, is immense. How do governors help keep abreast of the rapid change and how do they ensure they are trained for the role? Do they feel well informed and, most importantly, how do they know?

Ofsted has provided key questions for governors (2014) to support them in finding the right information at the right time and to enable discussion between governors and school leaders regarding the school's performance data. A selection is below;

- Is this the picture that you were expecting?
- Are standards rising in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 4?
- How is your school performing compared with other schools with a similar intake of pupils?
- Are there differences between groups of pupils?
- Are all pupils making the levels of progress expected of them?
- Has attendance improved over the last three years?

However, despite the inspection criteria regarding the 'promotion of tolerance' and 'clarity' of the ethos – no questions refer to ethos. Furthermore, in the skills audit for prospective governors to decide upon



which skills and experience they bring to a GB (created by the NGA) there is no reference to ethos or religious character either. How can governors be assured then that the ethos or distinctiveness of the Catholic school is being addressed if they are not being inspected on it? Do governors understand the term `ethos`?

## **2.5 The “Best” Governance?**

If Morris (2015) suggests an effective GB must consist of the right balance of skills, attributes and experiences then an audit of those skills is necessary. The NGA provides a Governor Skills Audit and recommend this for best practice, however, within the Catholic school; it is recommended the CES Governing Body Skills Audit is used. Within this audit governors are asked about their understanding of the Catholic character of schools and the history of the Church’s involvement in the education system of England and Wales amongst other things. Governors are asked to rate themselves on a scale from “Extensive” knowledge to “None” and then highlight whether training is required. As this audit is a *self*-audit how does the GB know whether it is true? One person’s perception of what he may think and know to be an understanding of the liturgical and sacramental life of the school may not be the same as another. How can this audit be rigorous for GB to ensure the appropriate individual with the relevant theological understanding and spiritual capital are serving as FG in our Catholic schools?

If the sacramental perspective of school distinctiveness is adopted then GB must have a desire to serve; to see the role of a governor in terms of service. Leaders and teachers must model their lives on Christ. Thus governors should see their work as a vocation and model their ministry on that of Jesus. Indeed, in a conversation with Storr in February 2015, he stated, when governors were faced with difficult decisions, he would always ask, “what would Jesus do?” GB should seek to be inclusive, enable others to flourish, provide challenge (in an enabling sense to show commitment) and in doing so, form a community which shows a mind of Christ.

The importance of practising the faith is fundamental here; how can one model Christ' ministry and be an ambassador for faith formation for young people if one doesn't feed their faith regularly? Hence, the requirement by the CES to be a practising Catholic.

The idea of time and commitment to be able to live out the mission of governance is important. Sullivan (2015) suggests that learning to listen is a key skill in Catholic school leadership – then having the conviction to open ones ears and reflect upon the information being shared is needed. This will ensure that misconceptions or misinterpretations are addressed and everyone understands the strategic and spiritual direction of the school. Furthermore, having time to attend training is crucial.

Finally, for governance to be effective especially in faith schools, the GB need to have a belief in education and an understanding of its place in a young person's faith journey. So, knowing the school curriculum and considering how it can enhance the transmission of values and 'help children become saints' is essential.

## **2.6 Conclusion.**

The first theme of this study; Catholic distinctiveness, is a difficult concept to articulate. The sacramental perspective explores the idea that everyone involved in Catholic education should model their lives on Christ. And so, distinctiveness finds itself in holistic-ness, inclusivity, partnership, service and above all; love. Ethos seeks to support and sustain these values through the school community in actions of prayer, practices and shared faith experiences. The distinctiveness of the Catholic school also presents itself as one seeking excellence – to discover the talents in each individual and help them realise their potential.

The second theme of this study; governance, has evolved rapidly through time from being the distant management committee needed to oversee funding streams to a governing body which is scrutinised and inspected by the state alongside the leadership of the school.

The link between both themes is that they both pursue school improvement; standards matter.

Whereas Sullivan (2015) points out that distinctiveness is compromised by the extrinsic pursuit of school improvement – the increased exam results, the expected progress measures – he sees this as a negative aspect for school leadership, Lydon (2015) disagrees as he states, ‘Ofsted can make Catholic schools better’ as both parties are addressing quality but in a different manner.

Distinctiveness and school improvement are both concerned with excellence – whether that is academic excellence or dignity of the individual. Catholic school distinctiveness addresses the quality of the individual whereas quality in secular terms is seen as results and progress; both are searching for the same ending. However, the question remains – do governors understand the relationship between Catholic distinctiveness and school improvement and if so, can it improve governance?

Having reviewed the literature on the themes of distinctiveness, governance and school improvement/scrutiny, it seems several issues are emerging;

- **The notion of ethos – the difficulty in articulating the concept.**
  - Do governors understand what this is? How can ethos/distinctiveness be monitored, reviews and evaluated?
  - How do governors seek to ‘engage all stakeholders in the faith life of the school’?
  - Within the sacramental perspective ‘we are all models of Christ’ – how do governors see their role?
- **The idea of training and recruitment**
  - Is training provided on ‘ethos’ or the ‘Catholic school’ and if so by whom? When? How often? And what impact does it have?
- **The boundaries of the role** – with increased scrutiny within the Ofsted criteria stating ‘carry out’, ‘contribute’, ‘monitor’, and ‘support’ – do they understand their role? How do they know? What, apart from

Ofsted and diocesan inspections – accountability or support is there for governors?

- How do governing bodies address **the support/challenge paradigm** concerning head teachers?
- What impact has the **statutory directive on Reconstitution** had on the Catholic life of school?
- What effect does **the Ofsted criteria** have on the way governors work in a Catholic school?

Having considered within this chapter the current landscape i.e. the review of literature on distinctiveness and the research carried out so far on the impact of Catholic school governance, the intention now is to investigate through questionnaires and interviews how governors maintain the balance between Catholics distinctiveness and school improvement measures amidst the recent increase in scrutiny. The emerging issues listed above and how they can be explored will be considered in a later chapter. The purpose of the next chapter is to describe how the research will be carried out and why certain research methodologies have been chosen.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology for conducting the research for this study. It will explore the two paradigms of research; qualitative and quantitative. It will consider which methods are most suitable for this study to ensure the information received has assured objectivity, is confidential and, as Burgess (2001:1) suggests, “addresses the needs of the research”.

This chapter will describe the practical and ethical issues which were considered before embarking upon the research to ensure the validity and reliability.

### **3.2 Research – A Definition**

Research as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (2012)

The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.

Lydon<sup>4</sup> further explores definitions of research in general by stating the most often cited definition is that of Lawrence Stenhouse who speaks of a research stance as “a disposition to examine one’s own practice critically and systematically”. Richard Pring<sup>5</sup> adopts and develops this definition slightly when stating that the term ‘research’ is used to refer to “any systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.” Pring uses this definition since it embraces not only empirical but also historical, documentary and philosophical research. Lydon highlights that the definition of research provided by Stenhouse and Pring is reflected in that of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which describes research as:

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<sup>4</sup> Lydon, J. (2011), *The Contemporary Catholic Teacher: A Reappraisal of the Concept of Teaching as a Vocation in the Catholic Christian Context*, Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing

<sup>5</sup> Pring 2004 *Philosophy of Educational Research* (2nd edition), London: Continuum

“Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications.”  
(OECD 1995:34)

Moreover, Michael Bassey takes up Pring’s notion of research as a systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry in his definition of educational research as:

“Critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action. This is the kind of value-laden research that should have immediate relevance to teachers and policy makers, and is educational because of its stated intention to ‘inform’. It is the kind of research in education carried out by educationists.”(1999:39)

Within the literature review the background to the main themes of this study were explored; distinctiveness, governance and school improvement/scrutiny. Therefore, this chapter will explain how the issues raised at the end of the literature review will be investigated in order to inform further educational judgments and new conclusions which may assist in future improvements in the work of school governance in preserving Catholic Distinctiveness.

### **3.3 Educational Research – Two Paradigms**

There are two research methodology paradigms; qualitative and quantitative. Bell succinctly cites Punch (2005:28) as she states that quantitative researchers, “collect facts and study the relationship between one set of facts to another,” whereas, “qualitative researchers are more concerned to understand individual perceptions of the world”. Krauss explains this further by highlighting that the debate between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms is one of philosophy not methodology (2005: 759). Krauss

explains that the term epistemology, or how we come to know (Trochim 2000 cited in Krauss 2005:758), helps us when we consider how we want to research. We must ask ourselves – how do we know what we already know? What counts as knowledge? And, what is the relationship between the knower and what is known? Understanding the evolution of knowledge is important in determining the way forward in the debate between qualitative/quantitative methodologies as perception and knowledge are difficult to measure as they continually contribute to the construction of meaning.

Within this study the theme of distinctiveness and governor understanding of what is meant by the term ethos/distinctiveness needs to be explored. The theory of epistemology needs to be considered when asking questions about “what do you think...?” or “what do you understand by...?” as this is basing the investigation upon assumptions, perceptions and previous learned knowledge – does this suffice?

### **3.4 The Qualitative Paradigm**

Lydon states that the qualitative paradigm reflects “an interpretive perspective focusing on impressions, ideas, opinions, comments and attitudes” (2011:1). Qualitative methodology is based upon perceptions and belief and grounded in the experience of practitioners.

Lydon argues the strength of the qualitative paradigm is the way it reflects philosophy in terms of phenomenology or, essentially the study of phenomena; how things appear to us in experience. Likened to the idea raised previously by Krauss – our understanding of and knowledge about the world around us has been created through our own conscious acts. And so, qualitative methods such as structured observations and interviews in order for the researcher to become immersed in the culture being studied are as legitimate as structured questionnaires or scientific experiments as, “the use of human language...in its own right, and for the virtually unique window that it opens on what lies behind our actions” (Robson 1993 cited in Lydon 2011:3).

In terms of this study one of the main issues to be explored is an understanding of ethos which is reliant upon the perception and experience of governors. As previously explored, ethos is a difficult idea to articulate and so asking questions and delving into common sense perceptions of everyday experiences as a governor of a Catholic school life will help find further meaning to the perennial Catholic leadership research conversation.

### **3.4.1 Interviews**

As well as observations, interviews are one research instrument which can be used within qualitative methodology. Interviews allow the research to probe responses and investigate feelings and motives Bell (2010:161). Furthermore, the purpose of qualitative research interviews are to find out what is inside a person's thought processes, to obtain information about those things that cannot be observed directly; attitudes, opinions, motivations and perceptions, in short, the way in which a respondent experiences his or her world (Patten 1990 cited in Lydon 2011:2).

Interviews can be adaptable and as long as the interview schedule questions reflect what the researcher needs to find out – the interview will be worthwhile. Patten speaks of three types of interviews; structured/formal, unstructured and lastly semi-structured.

As one theme of my research involves 'ethos' or 'distinctiveness' I need more than "yes" or "no" responses – these quantifiable answers can be achieved through a questionnaire. Likewise, the disadvantage of using unstructured interviews is that they can be time consuming and can be viewed as a highly subjective technique therefore most likely to be open to bias (Bell 2010:161), and could be difficult to transcribe or decipher later during analysis.

Thus, the use of semi-structured interviews will be a suitable compromise. The interview schedule will allow me to have the main questions in advance



but I will also include added probes to help deepen a response. Geertz<sup>6</sup> (1973 cited in Lydon 2011) speaks of “thick descriptions”. Semi-structured interviews will provide me with the flexibility to ask further questions in order to decipher deeper meaning. The work of Geertz explored interpretive analysis in search of meaning; observing the behaviour/response and then considering the meaning behind it – questioning in such a manner during semi-structured interviews will provide me with richer data based on perceptions and life experiences which can be analysed to find logic.

### **3.5 The Quantitative Paradigm**

Lydon states that the quantitative paradigm “reflects a positivistic approach to reality...emphasising that knowledge can be advanced based only on observable data and sense experience” (2011:1). In other terms; this method uses data and statistical procedures to determine further thought. As Bryman states, “quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not”<sup>7</sup>.

Bryman continues with the exploration of quantitative research by suggesting that the collection and analysis of data concentrates more of the relationships between theory and research – with more accents on theory. He adds, the practices of the quantitative strategy are more scientifically/positivism based. Finally, Bryman states that quantitative research “embodies the view that social reality as external, objective reality”.

Quantitative methodology can ensure objectivity especially within Pring’s trust as seeing quantifiable data as, “naïve realism” (2000) – the way things are or common sense realism which can be easy to measure? Naïve realism ensures that there is objectivity without the bias and therefore “I see it, therefore it is” mentality which is measurable and quantifiable.

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<sup>6</sup> Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books cited in Lydon, J. (2011), *The Contemporary Catholic Teacher: A Reappraisal of the Concept of Teaching as a Vocation in the Catholic Christian Context*, Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing

<sup>7</sup> Bryman, A (1992) *Social Research Strategies*, Social Research Methods, 3-25, Oxford University Press.

Bearing in mind Bryman and Pring's ideas on quantitative methodology – it provide hard, measurable data which will link to a possibly already formed theory. However, in terms of this study, a theory is not yet formed – the purpose of the questionnaire is to allow me ascertain definite opinions which can be measured yet the meaning behind the response needs to be explored through extended questions.

### **3.5.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires along with surveys are one research instrument used for quantifiable research. Questionnaires can ensure objectivity, they are easy to arrange, can provide standardised answers in a succinct way and provide easy collation for the researcher. In addition, questionnaires are more likely receive a positive response than an interview as they are less time consuming (if they include tick/score elements) and be completed confidentially.

A disadvantage as Bell highlights is questionnaires are, “fiendishly difficult to design” (2010:140) and so careful design, writing and the useful process of piloting can help ensure the final copy creates an excellent return of response.

### **3.6 Selection of Research Instruments**

I agree with Bryman when he states,

“...interconnections between the different features of quantitative and qualitative research are not as straightforward...while it is useful to contrast the two research strategies, it is necessary to be careful about hammering a wedge between them too deeply (1992:20)”

Conducting social research is a complex process and even though the remit of this study is to be able to measure response from a numerical perspective in order to gain conclusion – the nature of the study is to explore opinion and perception in order to add to the research conversation concerning school improvement and governance. Therefore, I feel a combination of a

questionnaire and interviews will allow me to measure data yet explore meaning.

I feel this multi-method interview/questionnaire combination will allow me to determine the accuracy of the information provided. It will also ensure there is balance of perceptions – clearly stated agree/disagree statements (the questionnaire) partnered with more extended and perception-based responses gauged from the interviews.

As previously emphasised questionnaire are useful because of their measurability and objectivity when analysing an issue however, the nature of themes of this study; distinctiveness/ethos, governance and scrutiny/school improvement require an interpretative perspective which is why I have used interviews as well.

As this study deals with a key theme of catholic school leadership; ethos I need to explore this understanding in it's connection with school improvement/governance and without having a conversation on a personal level with an individual – it would be difficult to gather conclusions and recommendations about the issue. The nature of my themes must allow for some subjectivity.

### **3.7 Selection of Candidates for Interview**

In order to investigate issues raised in the previous chapter; the notion of ethos and the difficulty in articulating the concept, I have decided to interview the Head teacher of Wellside School.

The Chair of Governors of Wellside School was unable to participate in the research and so I will interview the Head teacher of a nearby Catholic high school which is in a different diocese. For the purposes of this study I will call this school Springside School.

The Head teacher of Wellside School has been in post for 14 months. He was a deputy head teacher for nine years at a Catholic high school. He has been a governor for 14 months. The Head teacher of Springside School is in

his second headship and has been a Head teacher for six years. I feel this blend of experience will help gauge a balanced response.

### **3.8 Interview Schedule and Rationale**

In developing the Interview Schedule I was keen to follow the advice of Drever as he states, “the schedule is important because it guarantees consistency of treatment across a set of interviews”(1995:18).

I developed the questions from the issues raised from the Literature Review. Some of the questions have been adapted or extended from the questionnaire and follow in the themes of; service, ethos, accountability and scrutiny.

I decided to omit questions on training and local authority involvement which features in the questionnaire as I want a more personal response to the interview questions as training issues can be dealt with in a quantifiable manner.

Within the interview I intend to tease out governor understanding towards ethos and how it relates to school improvement. In utilising Drever’s advice, I have sequenced my questions in order to develop thinking rather than influence it. For example, the first opening question enquires, “Do you think governance is an act of service?” which does require a Yes or No, however, the probe of “in what way?” may help the interviewee relax a little and begin to consider their role of a Catholic ambassador in school. Further questions which follow refer to accountability and Ofsted scrutiny which may prove challenging for the interviewee.

I have also included prompts for myself in question 2 to help the interview flow but also probes (Drever 1995:23-28) in questions 3-7 to give the interviewee an opportunity to clarify or explain their response.

Moreover, I have looked at including a branching structure in question 5. Question 5 is the *main* question as it enquires about ethos and school improvement as “one and the same”. I need to include a branching structure

at this point to help prompt my further questioning which is dependent upon the response of the interviewee.

The final interview question is a “very open sweep question” (Drever 1995:27) which will help conclude the interview but may also stimulate further discussion about an aspect of my research I may not have considered. Further I have included this question because I know the Head teacher and Chair of Governors within a professional capacity and I would not want to conclude the interview on a negative note if they feel they have been misunderstood.

Lastly, I end with a thank you – for general courtesy!

The interviews will take place in the privacy of the Head teacher’s office at Wellside School.

### **3.9 Questionnaire and Rationale**

In designing the questionnaire I considered again the issue raised at the end of the Literature Review;

- **The notion of ethos – the difficulty in articulating the concept.**
  - Do governors understand what this is? How can ethos/distinctiveness be monitored, reviewed and evaluated?
  - How do governors seek to ‘engage all stakeholders in the faith life of the school’?
  - Within the sacramental perspective ‘we are all models of Christ’ – how do governors see their role?
- **The idea of training and recruitment**
  - Is training provided on ‘ethos’ or the ‘Catholic school’ and if so by whom? When? How often? And what impact does it have?
- **The boundaries of the role** – with increased scrutiny within the Ofsted criteria stating ‘carry out’, ‘contribute’, ‘monitor’, and ‘support’ – do they understand their role? How do they know? What, apart from

Ofsted and diocesan inspections – accountability or support is there for governors?

- How do governing bodies address **the support/challenge paradigm** concerning Head teachers?
- What impact has the **statutory directive on Reconstitution** had on the Catholic life of school?
- What effect does **the Ofsted criteria** have on the way governors work in a Catholic school?

If these issues were in mind then Burgess's guidance; "a crucial part of good research design concerns making sure that the questionnaire design addresses the needs of the research" (2001:1) would be adhered to and a successful response achieved. Thus questions were worded from the Literature Review apart from the first question regarding *service* which was added to gauge response in relation to the sacramental perspective on Catholic distinctiveness.

As questionnaires are time efficient I wanted to ensure the questionnaire looked simple to complete and so I included firstly a table-like format adopted from the Ofsted questionnaire used for staff and parental response (before the online Parent View was introduced). Plus, this style of questionnaire included a Likert- style scale which is easily measurable as it requires agree/disagree response and simple tick boxes for easy completion.

Using Burgess' (2001:7) advice on layout and sequence, I included a title and deadline date for submission – not too long as I feel respondents may forget. Furthermore, similar to in the Interview Schedule, I sequenced the questions together to allow flow of thought; Ethos, Distinctiveness & Mission, followed by Training and then Ofsted Accountability – this also reflects the themes of this study. In all in all, the look of the questionnaire was clear and concise which may contribute to a high response rate.

### **3.9.1 Piloting**

As with all research instruments it is important to test the questionnaire on a small sample first (Burgess 2001:15).

My first draft of the questionnaire was adapted from Storr's research which featured in the Appendices of 'Serving Two Masters' (2011). I gained verbal consent from Storr to adapt his questionnaire for my own research purposes then shared this draft with the Head teacher and a governor at Wellside School.

From feedback it was deemed the questionnaire was too long and there was not an opportunity to expand upon the answers for the tick box questions. Furthermore, the final section was too invading in that it asked too many personal questions – how could the questionnaire remain anonymous if gender, age etc. were being asked – respondents would be able to be identified. Also, if the governor and Head teacher were to complete this questionnaire and an interview – what would be asked in the interview?

Thus, I completely redrafted the layout, structure and adapted the Ofsted style which I felt was manageable. I discussed the questionnaire again with the governor and, as it was on two pages – it looked better presented, neater and simple to complete.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

It was necessary to devote significant attention to the ethical issues surrounding this study as not only did I know the respondents as colleagues but I worked in the study school in a leadership capacity.

I needed to solicit consent from the Head teacher of Wellside School to ensure he understood what and who were involved in my study and what the outcomes would be and what potential positive impact that could have on the school.

The extent to which respondents are more likely to be open and honest with researchers will depend upon how the researchers have been able to construct an "ethical environment" (Busher and James 2007:118). It was

necessary therefore, to ensure the confidentiality of respondents was utmost. Consequently, I provided all respondents with a Participant Information Sheet which outlined the purpose of the study and information regarding the destination of the data. I also emphasised the voluntary nature of the study and within the Participant Information Consent Form, I included a withdrawal slip if the participant felt he/she could no longer participate.

Furthermore to ensure respondents felt they could be honest especially during the interviews I need to guarantee I practise *epoche*<sup>8</sup>. As I know the interviewees within a professional capacity this will be a challenge to keep my mind-set impartial and concentrate on the job in hand; interviewing individuals in order to provide a detailed analysis of the research findings in order to offer relevant recommendations for the future of governance and school improvement practice.

### **3.10.1 Confidentiality**

Sapsford and Abbott remind us,

Confidentiality is a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form, while anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondents. (1996:318-19 cited in Bell 2010:49)

In presenting the questionnaires they will be distributed to a group of people. I have numbered the questionnaires for ease of collation and analysis later. I also clarified in the Participation Information Sheet that their responses will remain confidential.

The statistical data will be held on my computer.

The response to the interviews is different as I will know who the respondents are! However, as mentioned in the Introduction of this study, the name of the school has been renamed, "Wellside School" to avoid identification.

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from Lydon's paper on Qualitative Paradigm; from the Greek verb to cease. This concept was introduced by Edmund Husserl who claimed that the phenomenologist, who will notice phenomena, and know purely his own 'life', must practice this. (2011:3)



### 3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the two research paradigms of qualitative and quantitative and the research instruments involved with them. I explained my reasons as to why I decided to use a multi-method combination of interviews and a questionnaire to ensure I have a balance of facts to analyse and perceptions to reflect upon.

Significantly, I have explained the design process of the both the questionnaire and interviews schedule in order to ensure the validity, reliability and certain objectivity in my research but also highlighted the salient fact that *epoche* needs to be practised during the interview process so judgement is not predetermined and I can make a true and comparable analysis of the data discovered.

The following chapter presents the data gathered by the research followed by my analysis and interpretation of the findings.

## **Chapter 4: Classification and Comparison of Research**

### **4.1 - Introduction**

The overall aim of this dissertation is to predominately focus on how governors in a Catholic high school maintain Catholic distinctiveness amidst the increased scrutiny of the government's standards agenda and drive for school improvement.

The literature review was carried out, which explored what Catholic distinctiveness is and how this relates to school improvement.

Further within the literature review a thorough exploration of the historical perspective of governance was offered in order to ascertain how management of schools and the balance of authority between the state and school leader/governors has evolved.

Then there was an examination of governor guidance and the national perspective on the role and function of effective governing bodies, followed by an exploration of the role of the foundation governors. Then ensued an analysis of the emerging scrutiny on governance through the eyes of Ofsted and how this links with the drive for school improvement; it is clear the scrutiny placed on governance is to 'ensure' and 'assure' that the school's vision and priorities are sustained with transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the review also examined what the 'best' or effective governance is and introduced the idea the drive for higher standards and school success and Catholic distinctiveness are one and the same; we are all searching for excellence and striving to realise the potential in the young.

From the literature review several issues emerged;

- The notion of ethos and a difficulty in articulating the concept
- The idea of training and recruitment
- The boundaries of the role of the governor
- Support/challenge paradigm – when? What? And how often?
- The impact of Reconstitution of Governing Bodies in 2014

- The impact of Ofsted criteria on the work of governors in a Catholic school

For my research I held semi structured interviews with two Head teachers of Catholic high schools. I used a questionnaire to survey the Governing Body of Wellside High School. Considering the principles and practices needed to be explored both qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken. The specific context of this project is distinctiveness and its connectedness to school improvement. Due to the nature of this topic, I needed to gain an insight into an individual's thought processes and information about things which I could not observe; attitudes, reflections, opinions and motivations that are, how a person interprets the world around them.

From the literature review the notion of ethos and the difficulty in articulating it was raised, thus I must use the method of interview to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Catholic school leaders to see if their perceptions and perspective are 'meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit' (Patton 1990 cited in Lydon 2011).

#### **4.2 Classification of Semi-Structured interviews**

For the purposes of classification the head teachers will be delineated as follows:

- Wellside High School (Head teacher A - HTA)
- Other High School ( Head teacher B - HTB)

What follows is a summary of the main findings from the semi-structured interviews with two secondary head teachers.

##### **1. Do you think governance is an act of service? In what way?**

HTA commented "absolutely"; all leadership is an act of service even those who are paid. Governance is modelled on the person of Christ- the way Christ conducts himself, for example, the washing of the feet, placing other before you, serving others, meeting the needs of others.HTA commented upon how a person forms a relationship with his peers or subordinates is very

important. HTA stressed as a Catholic leader you need to have an understanding of the community you serve –it's not all about status.

HTB said that he thought governance is an act of service as people give freely of their time and experience to further the common good.

## **2. What do you think ethos is?**

HTA explained that ethos is a mixture of culture, founding principles of an organisation and felt it should be included in all decisions, policies and relationships. HTA said the ethos of a Catholic school is based upon gospel values and the example of Christ and that ethos is an additional dimension which addresses the spiritual development of the whole child. He stated that you cannot separate the accountability and the development of every child as this is the mission of Catholic schools and it is rooted in gospel values, as St Irenaeus said, "the glory of God is manfully alive," and thus distinctiveness manifests itself in each and every one of us. He believed that we see the glory of God when we ask pupils to do great things.

HTB said that ethos is where ones underlying philosophy is made visible. He said Catholic ethos is where our vision of Jesus Christ can be seen and felt tangibly. In both explicit ways (masses, prayers, assemblies, RE) and implicitly in our relationships with children and adults modelled on the person of Jesus.

## **3. How do you, as a governor, think there increased accountability has changed governance in Catholic school?**

HTA responded; we use the GSEF (Governor Self-Evaluation form) which has given our governors greater access and scrutiny and the guidance for governance is still confusing and open to misinterpretation. It is right that governors have greater power but it can be abused and leads to problems. The role of governors needs to be further defined; strategic versus operational and the service aspect should be evident in the relationship between head teacher, governors and the senior leadership team. As for the focus of meeting, those are set by the local authority so are very generic (I

understand why safeguarding and policy reviews need to be there) but we need to ask ourselves- what needs to be on our school agenda? Should there be a Catholic focus on it?

HTB said that the increased level of accountability has focused governors on data, progress and Ofsted. These can become primary motors of improvement in school and governors, particularly priest governors, are constant reminders of what should be our primary focus; that is bringing the vision of Jesus our young people. HTB said governors often raise this when they feel we are being too Ofsted or progress focused.

**4. Do you feel the increased scrutiny has changed the role boundaries of governors?**

HTA said yes he felt it has muddled the waters as sometimes governor's focus on the minutiae rather than being pupil-centred. In the pupil welfare meeting there needs to be an amended agenda whereby there is more focus on pupil welfare and pupil outcomes.

HTB said that the role boundary had not changed at all. He knew that the governors clearly understood the boundaries between governance and the strategic running of the school.

**5. Is the increased accountability and Catholic distinctiveness one and the same)? If so, how do governors keep the balance? What do they do in/around school? Do these things work? How do they/you know?**

HTA said that distinctiveness/accountability is not the same however, went on to explain that distinctiveness enhances standards. It is not standards for standards sake but for the sake of the child. Our governors do not keep the balance as they are not pupil focused enough, in time they will be.

HTA continued to say governors are involved in staff recruitment below SLT level (to ensure Catholics have a fair crack of the whip). There are more governors present in assemblies, the parish priest, a school governor, says weekly mass. Governors attend parent evenings. Within the GSEF there is

an “Ethos” section which is discussed with governors and staff. Governors are involved in charitable funding activities and it is successful as long as they know the strategic/operational boundaries of their role.

HTB’s response was that he believed that we are all part of God’s creative process; fulfilling the potential of each individual in order to incarnate God’s kingdom. HTB said he saw the achievement of youngsters as liberational. HTB said excellent achievement and outstanding Ofsted grades will result because of the hard work of staff but they are not the reason for it. Schools should not idolise Ofsted grades and league tables. School leader’s work of service may result in success at Ofsted but is not the purpose of service.

**6. Is ethos monitored and evaluated just like achievement, if so, in what way? What impact does it have?**

HTA said it is not monitored as there is no real hard data for ethos. How can it be monitored - through the rate of exclusions? HTA explained that within the GSEF Ethos is explored and objective to improve the prayer life of the school (to improve a child’s understanding of inner grace is included). The role of the chaplain serves a purpose in monitoring the ethos – leads prayer and offers excellent opportunities for spiritual reflection. It is difficult to measure ethos and how can impact be seen? The section 48 is not reflective of a schools ethos and HTA is intending to refine the Section 48 form so it becomes more informative. HTA commented that there needed to be staff INSET on ethos so staff can gain an understanding of why Wellside School is the way it is- based on Christian values and the idea of service – this needs to be embedded.

HTB commented that his school have a Catholic Ethos Governors Self-Evaluation Forum who decides on the SEF grades for Catholic ethos. The school has a formal SEF and Catholic Ethos is the first priority in the School Improvement Plan. Springside School was awarded Outstanding in Section 48 March 2015.

## **7. Is Ofsted good for Catholic schools? Why do you think so?**

HTA stated that overall Ofsted is good for all schools as a regulatory body – not a policy setting machine. HTA said DfE has damaged Catholic schools for example – charging for bus passes if a parent chooses to send their child to a faith school if it is not the nearest school to them or secondly, not including Religious Education in the EBacc subjects list. All these have an impact on pupil admission numbers and the future of Catholic education.

HTB said that Ofsted and increased accountability have been drivers in improvement in Catholic schools. The Section 48 inspection has also helped ensure that our core and distinctive purpose remain a priority. He commented that a downside is the temptation to meet the demands of Ofsted which compromise our values. Catholic schools have to be bold – HTB said that his school serves the most needy and often troubled youngsters. HTB added this can have a drag effect on achievement – even though it is the right thing to do.

## **8. Is there anything about this topic I have not asked you?**

HTA said yes – the notion about Foundation Governance and how this is organised – he suggested there needs to be a proper code of practice based on a concept of leadership for serve. HTA suggested a rotational programme for foundation governors whereby they move around schools to gain a better insight and experience this would avoid factions and fixed mind-sets.

HTB had no more questions or comments to make though commented that the questions posed were thought-provoking and wished he had had them in advance so he could prepare!

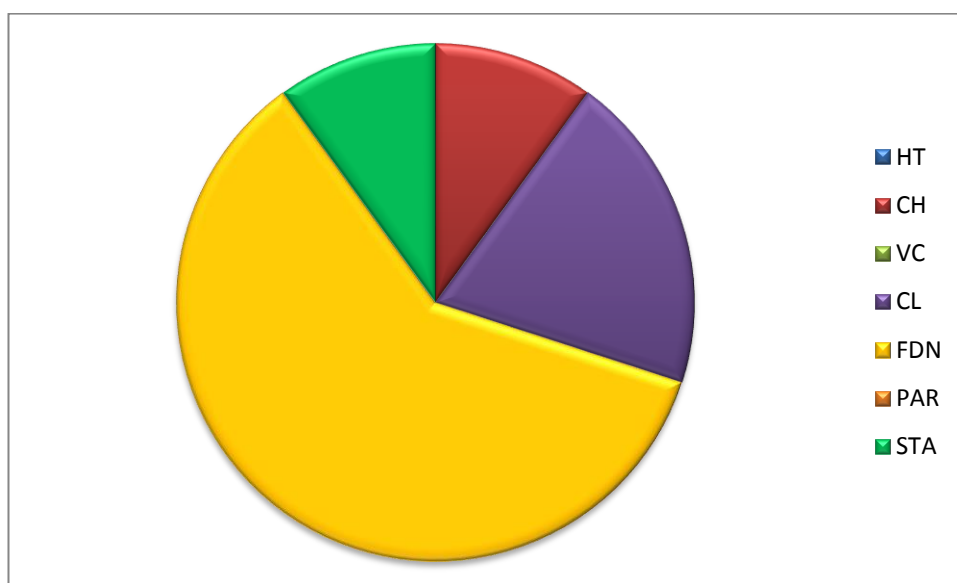
## **9. Any further comments or questions?**

HTA said he had enjoyed being interviewed and found it quite challenging as the some of the questions had made him really think and reflect, which he sometimes has little time for.

### 4.3 Classification of Questionnaires Distributed to the Governing Body

The questionnaires were distributed to the governing body at Wellside High School. The response rate to this paper based survey was 56%. 18 questionnaires were distributed; 10 completed responses were received, 2 withdrawals were made and 6 non-returns.

**Figure 1: Nature of Response from Questionnaire (in terms of governor role/capacity)**



(HT: Headteacher (there was no response as I interviewed them), CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FND: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff)

It can be seen that the highest level of response is from foundation governors which makes the data richer as it is this group of individual on whom I wish to focus especially in terms of understanding of Catholic Distinctiveness/Ethos.

To assist in the analysis of the questionnaire a Likert scale was used similar to the Ofsted questionnaire for some of the questions. As Bell (2010:224) suggests, a coding frame has been followed for the purpose of classification;

- Strongly Agree (SA)

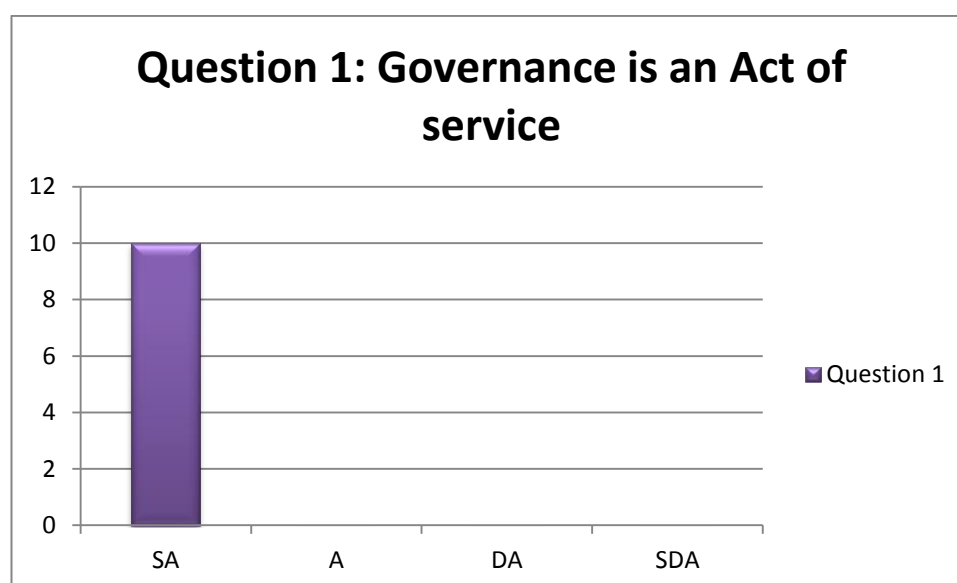


- Agree (A)
- Disagree (D)
- Strongly Disagree (SDA)

I did not include a 'Don't Know' response as I wanted to gauge a definite opinion to the posed question. Furthermore, I combined closed, scaled response questions with questions which allowed the respondent to expand on their answer. I needed an extended response in some areas to permit me to explore the idea of ethos and how it is perceived for example, or how governors perceived their contribution to the school mission/development plan.

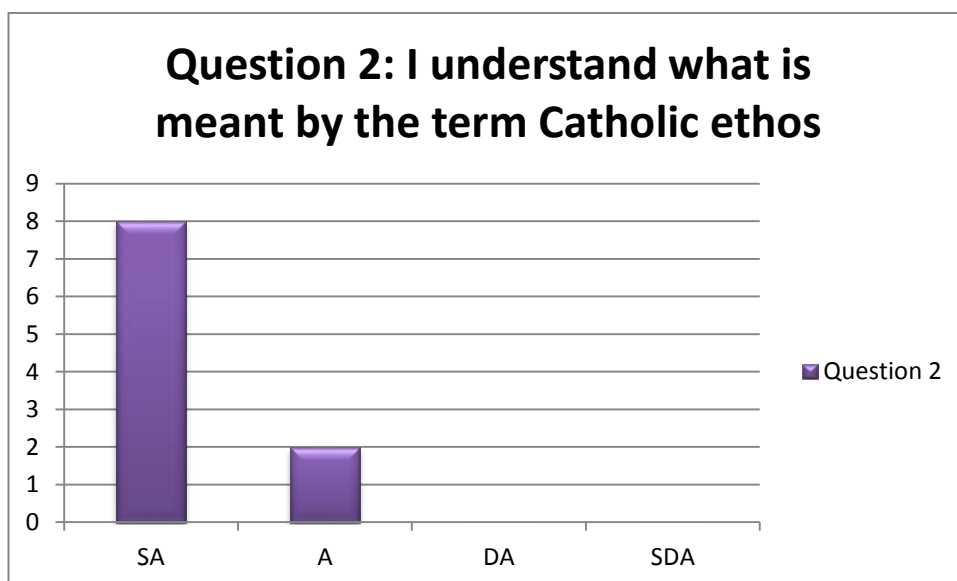
What follows is a summary of the main findings.

**Figure 2:**



With a 100% response of Strongly Agree all governors felt their role of governor was that of service.

**Figure 3**



A strongly positive response with 80% (8/10) demonstrating a strong understanding of the term ethos whilst 20% (2/10) an agreeable understanding.

### **Question 3: Catholic Ethos is...**

Responses from participants as follows (*code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff*);

“God is at the heart of everything we do. We are distinctive and want the best for each child, not just academic achievement but also social development and concern for others” (FDN)

“Promoting education for the whole child in the context of the Holy Gospel and the sacramental life of the catholic church” (CL)

“A lived experience that permeates every aspect of school life” (FDN)

“The Catholic Christian fabric of the whole school” (CH)

“Recognising each child is a child of God. This recognition helps us to ensure each child strives to attain their best both educationally and spiritually” (FDN)

“Living life as a disciple of Jesus Christ guided by gospel values. To serve the needs of all members of the school community” (FDN)

It is the life lived, the experiences shared by the children, parents, staff and governors. Relationships with God and each other is at the core of our mission" (FDN)

"How the school feels" (STA)

"Promoting, upholding, encouraging the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church" (CL)

"The fundamental values and principles of Christianity, along with the teachings and upholding all the Catholic principles and beliefs through our daily lives" (FDN)

**Question 4: As a governor, I contribute to the ethos of the school by...**

Responses from participants as follows (*code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff*);

"Being a critical friend, prepared to challenge, to ascertain that all we do is influenced by Christ" (FDN)

"By representing the Bishops of the diocese in my personal ministry as a priest" (CL)

"Attending all school liturgical events and being the link governor for School Council and production of the school constitution" (FDN)

"Undertaking my duties with the spirit of God's teachings in my mind when making decisions" (CH)

"Assisting the head teacher by holding short spiritual assemblies with year 10 classes and assisting the chaplain as part of the Catholic Ethos Group" (FDN)

"I help ensure good leadership so there is holistic approach to educating each pupil to ensure they are fit for life beyond high school" (FDN)

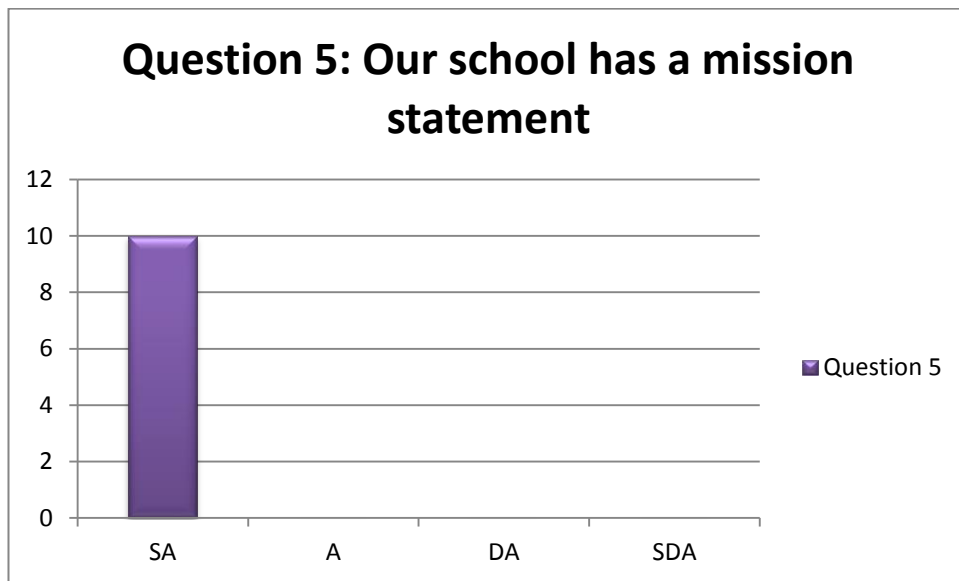
"Ensure each appointments made at school is within the ethos. I offer my ideas, support and listen to others to support the development at our school" (FDN)

"I contribute by my demeanour and by examples of a positive attitude around school" (STA)

"Regularly saying mass weekly and on feast days. Being involved in school presentations, awards" (CL)

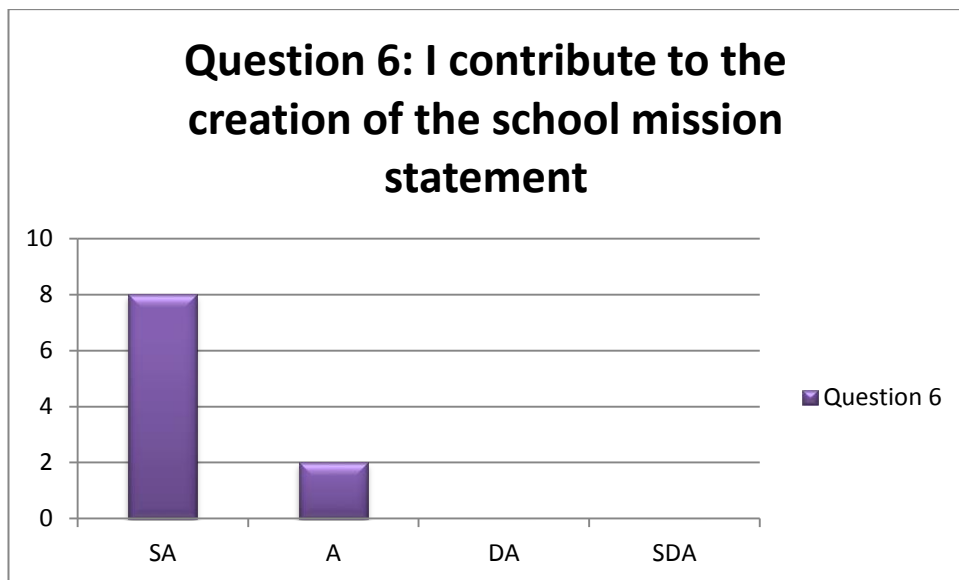
"Demonstrating my beliefs and upholding the teachings of Christ during my decision making. By showing good example and practising my faith" (FDN)

**Figure 4**



Once again an overwhelming positive response with 100% confirming that their school had a mission statement; which is what would be expected in a Catholic school.

**Figure 5**



A high positive response (80% - 8/10; strongly agree and 20% - 2/10; agree) demonstrates that the governors contribute to the school mission statement at Wellside school.

**Question 7: I contribute to the creation of our school mission statement by...**

Responses from participants as follows (code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff);

“Ensuring it is clear to all children, staff, parishioners and visitors” (FDN)

“Helping appoint staff with Christian sympathies and ensure all school policies reflect the values of the gospels” (CL)

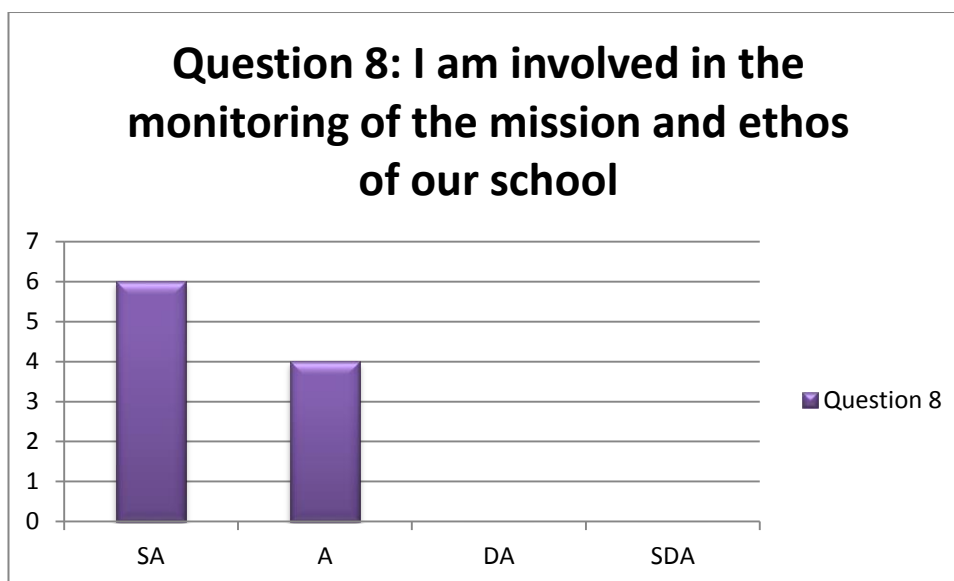
“Practising the faith and working with the school chaplain” (FDN)

“I support my parish and my school giving freely of my time” (FDN)

“By ensuring students to be involved and perform to their highest personal level” (STA)

“Preserving the catholicity of the school during the recruitment process” (FDN)

**Figure 6**



A positively agreeable response to involvement on the monitoring of the mission/ethos with 60% (6/10) strongly agreeing and 40% (4/10) agreeing validates that governor involvement in checking the Catholic mission is high.

### **Question 9: I monitor the school mission and ethos by...**

Responses from participants as follows (*code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff*);

“Regularly attending GB meetings and celebrating successes at awards days” (FDN)

“Ensuring her curriculum has equal opportunity for all, further questioning at meetings and attend parent evenings to welcome parents and listen to their opinions” (FDN)

“Attend appropriate meetings, training on policy procedures and involve myself in community events” (FDN)

“As a governor it is part of my role to ensure the head teacher is held to account on mission and ethos of the school. I personally have private discussions with the head teacher on the mission and ethos of the school and its implementation” (FDN)

“As part of the GSEF group” (FDN)

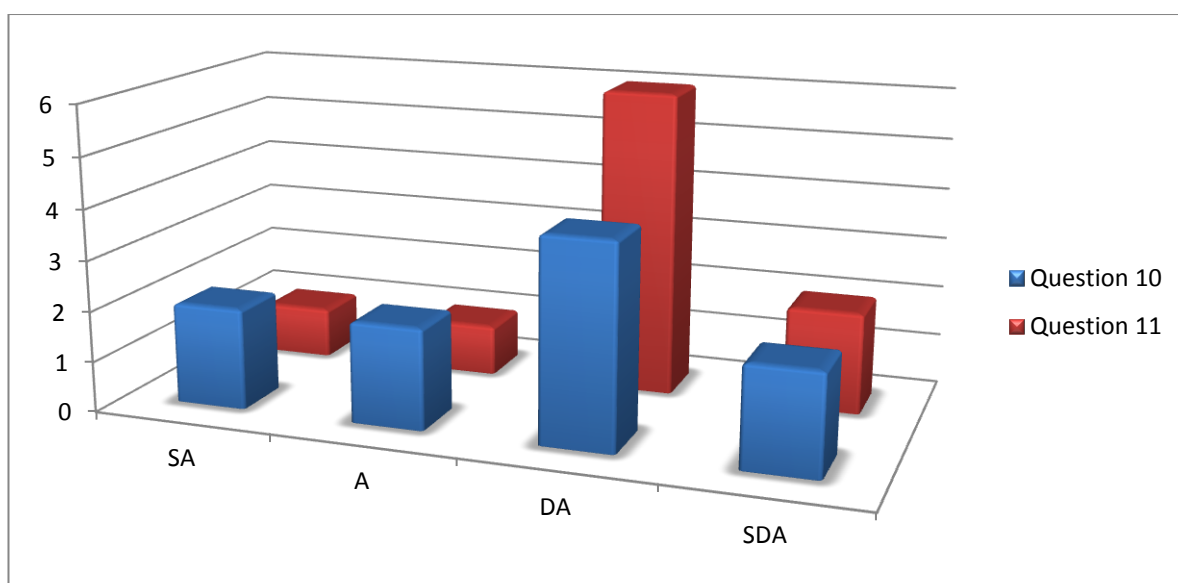
“By weekly conversations with the head teacher and through active enquiry at governor meetings” (CH)

“As part of the GSEF group, being part of teacher interview process” (FDN)

### **Comparison of Question 10 and 11**

As these question referred directly to training offered to governors either by the Local Authority or the Archdiocese I thought I would compare the response in order to determine which provision was better attended.

**Figure 7**



Question 10 asked about the level of attendance at Local Authority Governor training and Question 11 asked about the level attendance at Archdiocese Governor training.

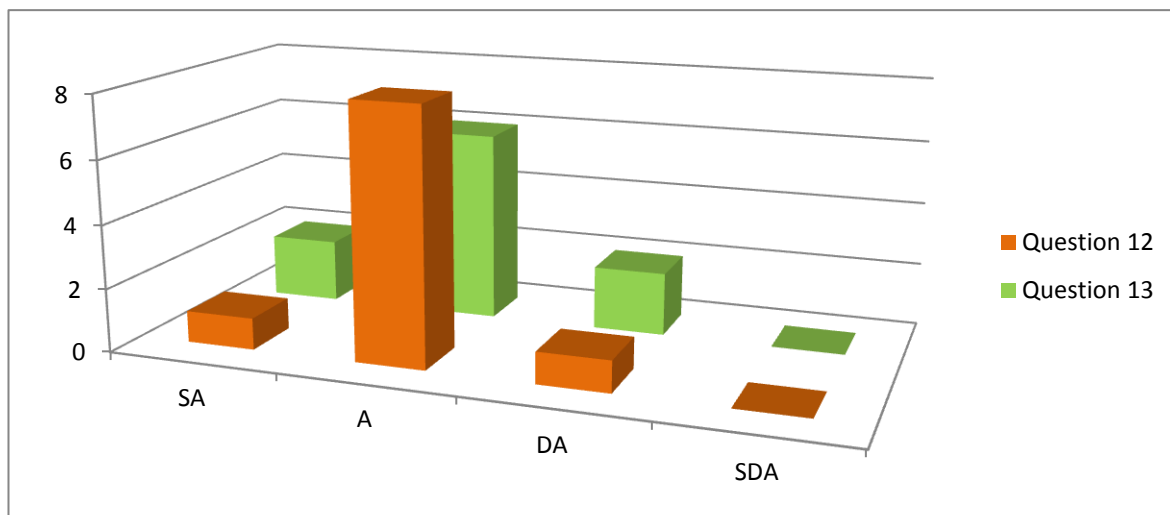
More governor attend LA training than Archdiocesan training as the distribution of positive response about attendance looks more favourably on Local Authority training as 40% (4/10) responded that they had attended whereas only 20% (2/10) had positively responded to their attendance for Archdiocesan training.

The highest negative response was attendance at Archdiocesan training with 60% (6/10) stating they had not attended in comparison to 40% (4/10) stating they had not attended LA training.

### **Comparison of Question 12 and 13**

As these question referred directly to the nature of the appropriateness of governor training either by the Local Authority or the Archdiocese I thought I would compare the response in order to ascertain which provision was perceived to be more useful or of benefit.

Question 12 asked whether respondents felt training provided by the Local Authority had benefitted their work as a governor.



**Figure 8**

Question 13 asked whether respondents felt training provided by the Archdiocese had benefitted their work as a governor.

Respondents felt training had benefitted their work as responses to both questions were more positive than negative with 90% (9/10) stating LA training was of benefit and 80% (8/10) felt Archdiocese training was of benefit.

20% (2/10) disagreed that Archdiocesan training was of benefit and 10% (1/10) stated LA training was not of benefit.

**Question 14: The training I received has benefitted my role as a governor by...**

Responses from participants as follows (*code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff*);

“An understanding of our role and responsibilities. Technical understanding e.g. FFT and Raise Online, finances.” (FDN)

“It is a matter of regret that the diocese has in recent times provided less training, because the LEA does provide excellent training. However it is affirming to meet others regularly as a diocesan network of Catholics” (CH)

“Keeping me up to date with current legislation” (CH)



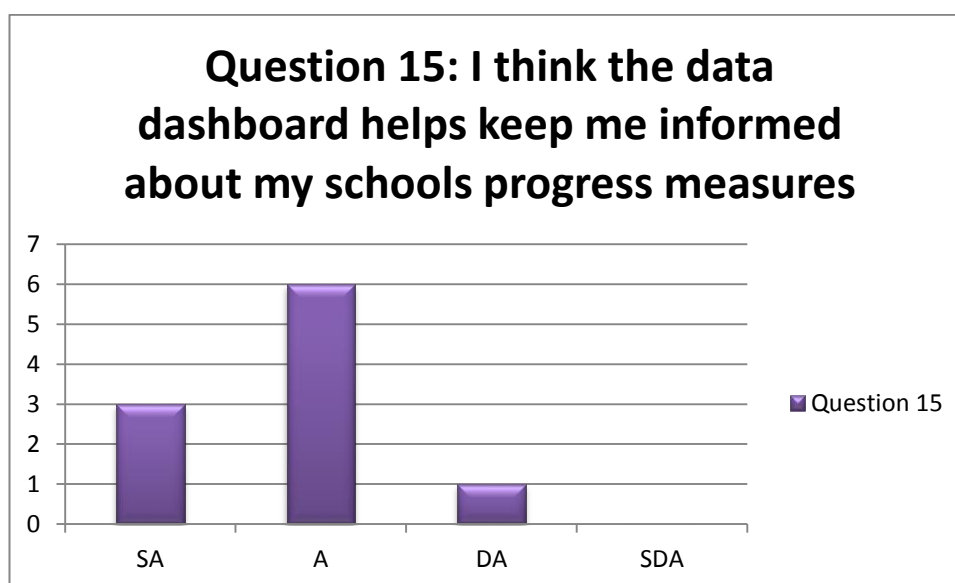
“Training has consolidated, reassured and encouraged – very informative. The diocese training is improving quickly” (FDN)

“It crystalizes my thoughts, gives me the chance to meet other Catholic governors” (FDN)

“I am aware of the responsibilities of each governing body committee” (STA)

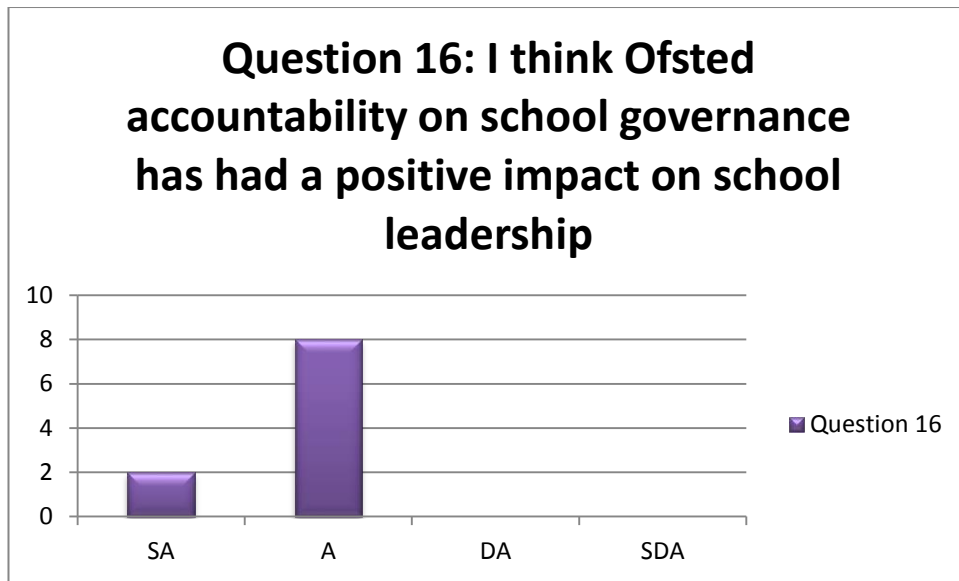
“Knowledge and understanding of the requirements and expectations of a governors” (FDN)

**Figure 9**



90% of respondents felt they were informed about the school’s progress measures through the data dashboard, with 1 respondent feeling he/she was not informed.

**Figure 10**



A highly positive result; 20% (2/10) respondents strongly felt Ofsted had had a confident impact upon school leadership with the remaining 80% (8/10) in agreement about the positivity Ofsted had created at leadership level.

**Figure 11**



An affirmative result that Ofsted has changed the role of governance with 90% agreeing that their role has changed since the increased scrutiny in 2012. One respondent (10% - 1/10) felt his/her role had not changed.

### Question 18: List the ways in which you think your role has changed...

Responses from participants as follows (code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff);

“Governors are now selected for their skillset making the GB more focussed and efficient, targeting their skills to the best area of governance for the best outcome for the school” (FDN)

“More demanding! Particularly in areas of confidentiality” (CL)

“Streamlining full governing body personnel” (STA)

“Accountability is more official. Catholic ethos thrives in spite of Ofsted” (FDN)

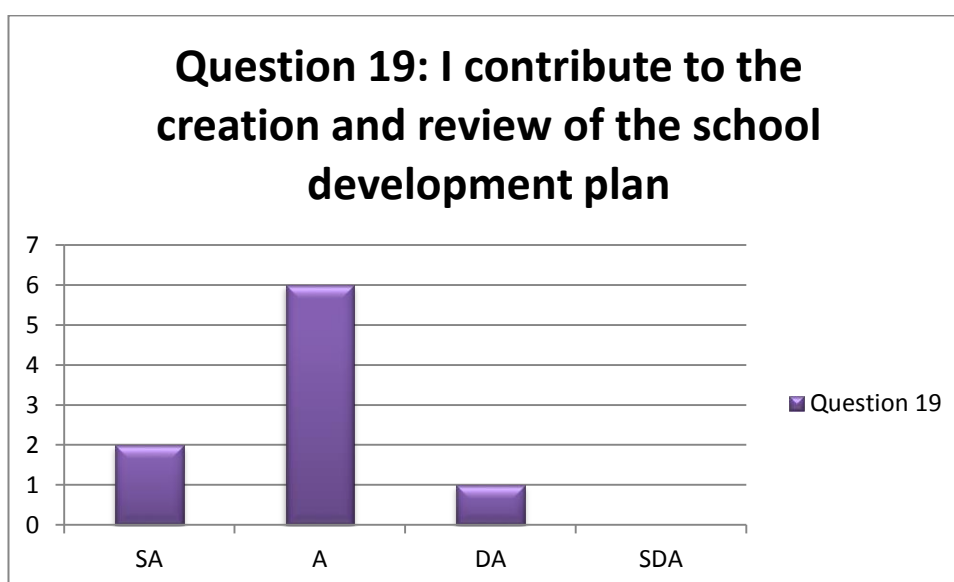
“Greater need to work as a team – HT, SLT, GB” (FDN)

“Greater awareness of data dashboard and an understanding financial and building responsibilities” (FDN)

“Levels of anxiety have been raised; data and paper can be overwhelming. Finding governors with the appropriate skills is all very well if there is pool of talent to choose from” (CL)

“Greater involvement during Ofsted and S48 visits” (FDN)

**Figure 12**



80% of governors felt they contributed to the creation and review of the SDP. One governor felt he/she did not contribute to the SDP.

## **Question 20: My contribution to the creation to the SDP is...**

Responses from participants as follows (*code for type of governor: CH: Chairperson, VC: Vice Chairperson, CL: Clergy, FDN: Foundation, PAR: Parent, STA: Staff*);

“Specific dedicated meetings to review the draft and signoff as part of my scrutiny role” (FDN)

“Liaising with the HT and other governors to affirm to GSEF document” (FDN)

“Involvement in panel meetings to review and constructing at every level with SLT” (CH)

“Working on the committee and GSEF group, also available for staff recruitment” (FDN)

“Making contact with the SLT member who has responsibility for my area of governance and to ensure the SDP is in line with expectations. As training link governor I encourage training of the GB to ensure we are in the strongest position to understand our SDP “(FDN)

## **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a summary of the interview responses from the 2 secondary Head teachers and the responses of the questionnaire in tabular/graph form. The extended responses of the questionnaire were also described.

The next chapter will analyse the data in the light of the literature review findings and begin to draw some conclusions on the relationship between Catholic distinctiveness, school improvement and the scrutiny of governance.

## **Chapter 5: Interpretation of Research in the Light of the Literature Review**

### **5.1 - Introduction**

This chapter will consider the results of the research data, which includes semi structured interviews and statistical evidence from questionnaires; in the context of the literature reviewed. I will analyse the findings in relation to the aims of the project which were to examine:

- Catholic Distinctiveness
- The role of Governance
- The increased scrutiny/accountability placed on school leadership and governance
- Maintaining the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness

### **5.2 Catholic Distinctiveness**

From the literature review it transpired that Catholic distinctiveness can be regarded as education for the soul or as Archbishop McMahon states, “education which transforms hearts” (2015). Distinctiveness can be defined using the idea of the sacramental perspective; all school leaders model their leadership on Christ (Lydon 2014: 2.3). With this in mind, school leaders, including governors, demonstrate a service leadership style and view leadership as a call to form a community. Therefore distinctiveness manifests itself as collaboration, making connections and collegiality.

Furthermore, as raised in the literature review, the idea that the drive for exam success is merely being seduced by shallow indicators of approval and counterproductive to an education based upon the gospel values is in fact myth; the search for excellence and dignity of every child is Catholic education itself. The standards agenda dictated by the government has

transcended from Catholic education, standards do matter; in GCSE results Catholic schools outperform the national average by 5%.<sup>9</sup>

Within the Head teacher interviews the idea of distinctiveness was explored by asking them what they thought ethos was.

HTA referred to a culture based upon gospel values and spoke of leaders being examples of Christ. This resonates with the sacramental perspective of Catholic distinctiveness revealing itself in the way school leaders see themselves as Disciples of Christ. The leader's role is to build capacity (Lydon 2014:2.3); to create an environment in which individuals flourish and feel empowered. HTA was very pupil-centred in his response – he felt very strongly that the Glory of God is seeing wonderful things from the pupils.

HTB referred to explicit and implicit aspects of Distinctiveness which were explored in the literature review. Ethos does show itself visibly in a school's physical environment which HTB said served as a reminder to the community; however, the implicit signs were more important.

Both head teachers could articulate confidently the notion of ethos and even though did not mention the sacramental perspective alluded to aspects of it in terms of service, challenge, discipleship and community.

Both head teachers agreed governance was an act of service. HTA stressed the importance of leaders' understanding of the community in which you serve which echoes Baroness Morris' suggestions of effectiveness governance.

In the governor questionnaire there was a highly positive response to the ethos question; 80% of governors understood the term "Catholic Ethos". Response from governors in Question 3 demonstrated a strong understanding of the pupil-centred approach to Catholic education and recognition that Catholic distinctiveness addresses the holistic nature of the

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<sup>9</sup> Taken from CES Document *Catholic Education in England and Wales*, May 2014. Statistics taken from Ofsted 2013 quarterly releases of official statistics and the DfE statistics.

individual. Responses also reflected an understanding of the importance of gospel values and the significance of community,

“God is at the heart of everything we do. We are distinctive and want the best for each child, not just academic achievement but also social development and concern for others”

Once again the idea of discipleship and service is alluded to as governor states,

Living life as a disciple of Jesus Christ guided by gospel values. To serve the needs of all members of the school community

And the Archbishop’s McMahon’s collaboration principle is echoed in,

It is the life lived, the experiences shared by the children, parents, staff and governors. Relationships with God and each other is at the core of our mission

### **5.3 The Role of Governance**

Within the Governor Handbook (2014), the DfE states the core functions of governing bodies are;

- d. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- e. Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff;
- f. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money well spent

The above functions noticeably connect with the sacramental perspective on the idea of governance as a calling to give direction and vision. Moreover, the idea of challenge is seen through the way governors hold the head teacher to account; after all, did Jesus’ disciples not question his methods?

Within the HT interviews, HTA response to the role of governance used the analogy of the washing of the feet. He stated it was important that governors placed others before themselves and emphasised the idea of governance as service; “it’s not all about status”. HTB mentioned the volunteer aspect of governance and the selfless aspect that people give freely of their time for the common good. This supports the notion of the role of governance as a

collaborative ministry – we aim to achieve, develop and fulfil things together as the CBCEW states,

Collaborative ministry is a way of working together in the life of the Church which the Church is given and to which it is called. It is a way of working together in which the quality of relationships developed is and as important as the task in which we are engaged (CBCEW: 1995)

In addition, the governor questionnaire gained a 100% responses to the role of service question. However, actions speak louder than words and so when asked in Question 4 how they contributed to the ethos of the school responses varied from physical presence,

“Attending all school liturgical events and being the link governor for School Council and production of the school constitution”

And recruitment (as in line with CES Foundation Governors responsibilities),

“Ensure each appointments made at school is within the ethos. I offer my ideas, support and listen to others to support the development at our school”

To eventually the idea of collaboration in which a governor stated,

“Being a critical friend, prepared to challenge, to ascertain that all we do is influenced by Christ”

Some also stated they “assisted”, “helped” “represented” and “made decisions” all with “the spirit of God’s teachings in my mind”. There was also affirmation of the perennial nature of Catholic education;

“I help ensure good leadership so there is holistic approach to educating each pupil to ensure they are fit for life beyond high school”

The responses demonstrated a governing body which understood its role as overseeing and guiding within the spirit of Christ. There was a sense of pride, positivity and enthusiasm in the responses.

#### **5.4 The Increased Scrutiny/Accountability Placed on School Leadership and Governance**

As examined in the Literature Review, Ofsted criteria clearly outlines that the scrutiny placed on governance is to ‘ensure’ and ‘assure’ that the school’s vision and priorities are sustained with transparency and accountability. In



doing so, the GB needs to engage, contribute, monitor and, importantly, understand the school's data.

Both HTA and HTB explained the important role their GSEF (Governors Self Evaluation Form) played in keeping governors informed and, fundamentally, involved in school improvement. Within the latest government manifesto there is high regard for system leadership and self-improving schools and thus the need to have resourceful governance which works closely with the senior leadership in a school is paramount.

HTB stressed the importance of the GSEF in terms of providing focus at meetings especially on progress and data.

However, there was a different, slightly negative response from HTA. Even though he recognised the GSEF gave governors greater access to school improvement, the introduction of more accountability measures on governance has led to misinterpretation. HTA sensed it may have been interpreted as governors having "more power", indeed he alluded some governors had been given this impression from training they had received , and this perceived power can be abused. On further probing, HTA explained that the boundaries between the strategic direction of the school and the operational aspects need to be further defined for governors. Within the DfE's Governors Handbook (09:2014) it stresses the importance of the strategic role of the governor. It advises 'avoid routine involvement in operational matters' (2014:10) and 'set the schools strategic framework and ensure statutory duties are met' (2014:9). HTA continued to state that governors need to be pupil-centred and so, agenda's need to focus more on children than on systems and protocol.

However, within the Governors questionnaire, Q16 asked about the effect of accountability on governance and Q17 and Q18 whether their role has changed and if so on what way. Responses to Q16 were positive; 20% strongly agreed the accountability had positive impact and 80% agreed.

All in all, governors felt the increased scrutiny was beneficial which resonates with Lydon's suggestion that, Ofsted is beneficial for Catholic schools, indeed, one governor specified,

"Accountability is more official. Catholic ethos thrives in spite of Ofsted"

Further expansion on their answers in Q18 outlined that statutory Reconstitution had streamlined governance and accountability had meant there was, "greater need to work as a team", "greater awareness of data dashboard" and "greater involvement during Ofsted and Section 48". Thus, although Sullivan (2000:165 cited in Lydon 2011:48) may see scrutiny and the drive for standards as the *key* challenge for Catholic education, the governors view it as a step in the right direction. Additionally, in an unpublished conversation with the Director of Education at Liverpool Archdiocese (February 2015), he stated there has been a *professionalization* of governance. With the increased accountability placed upon school governance and leadership there is a need for individuals who have certain professional skills to cope with the demands of the newly-scrutinised role. He stated the "coffee shop mentality" needed to go and people with managerial, leadership and financial backgrounds must be recruited for governance. This is recognised by governors as in one response it stated,

"Governors are now selected for their skillset making the GB more focussed and efficient, targeting their skills to the best area of governance for the best outcome for the school"

Interestingly, there was a negative response within Q18,

"More demanding! Particularly in areas of confidentiality"

"Levels of anxiety have been raised; data and paper can be overwhelming. Finding governors with the appropriate skills is all very well if there is pool of talent to choose from"

These responses represent a small minority and both came from the Clergy – does this merely reflect the tremendous workload placed on priests or is there still a tension between the Church and the state when Catholic education is concerned?

The point raised about recruitment a curious one. If the Director of Education highlights the need for professionals to apply as governors how will this be pursued and how can the CES be certain new recruits understand faith education?

### **5.5 Maintaining the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness**

It is clear from the research that governors feel the increased accountability placed upon them has been beneficial as it has helped provide focus and greater awareness. However, how can governors be assured that they remain mindful of the true mission of the school?

In HT Interviews Q5 HTA and HTB were asked how they felt governors kept the balance.

HTA felt the governors needed to be more pupil-focused. Governor assistance in recruitment has ensured the strongest candidate was appointed and they were not necessarily always Catholic. Presence of governors at Parent Evenings has helped contribute to the community feel and has helped governors become accessible. Being on the “chalk-face” of school life has given governors the experience of meeting parents, discussing concerns or asking questions – this has helped improve understanding of the role of teachers.

Foundation Governor presence at liturgical events helps support the spiritual dimension but HTA added that assistance at charitable events and school productions contributes to the Christian community. This links to the concept of distinctiveness as the values which underpin our Christian communities; “where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them” (Matthew 18:20).

HTB and HTA both recognised the importance of GSEF as a mechanism for involving governors in Catholic school life. Inclusion of an Ethos section in school evaluation gave rise to discussion about mission, ethos and the Catholic dimension of the school. I feel these responses highlight the distinct

nature of Catholic leadership which is open and optimistic. According to Selznick (1992)<sup>10</sup>,

The fourth element of a flourishing community is high levels of participation. Everybody matters; each person has a part to play; we can all make a difference (1992:360)

Governors also felt the introduction of the GSEF (Ethos) mean they were more connected in the monitoring of the ethos and mission of the school,

“As a governor it is part of my role to ensure the head teacher is held to account on mission and ethos of the school. I personally have private discussions with the head teacher on the mission and ethos of the school and its implementation”

It is clear from the response the GSEF plays an important role in maintaining or preserving the school ethos acting as a monitoring tool for school leaders. It could also be a starting point for discussions on the spirituality of the school. Presently, the Archdiocese has its own SEF form for Section 48– how could this be redesigned and updated so it meets the challenges of today’s Catholic school leadership? Could governors become part of the re-design process and in doing so, be provided with training on the foundations of Catholic education?

HTA also indicated the need for staff understanding of ethos so an understanding of “why Wellside School is the way it is” could be achieved. This highlights the need for all the school community to invest in itself (be a self-improving community of Love) and that sense, meaning and spirit are more important than anything else.

## **5.6 Further Evidence and Analysis from the Governor Questionnaire**

The Governors from Wellside School completed the questionnaire. Some of the responses and data have been referred to previously; however, there are other responses which need further analysis. I have placed these into 4 sections for ease of correlation and review.

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<sup>10</sup> Selznick 1992 cited in Module 1 CSL Booklet, Murphy, A & Fincham, D. 2013 p1.9

### 5.6.1 The Articulation of Ethos

One of the issues emerging from the Literature Review was the notion of ethos and the difficulty in articulating the concept.

Q2, 3, 4 and 7 sought to address this issue. The positive response from Q2 confirmed governors said they understood what ethos was. Q3 allowed governors to expand their thoughts and generally the response was good; responses referred to the whole child, gospel values, holistic-ness, living life as a disciple and promoting the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Only one response from a staff governor (who is Catholic) raised concern - "how the school feels". I understand the term may refer to the welcome of a school but it was a vague answer which needed elaboration.

CES summarise that governors need to be able to articulate what they feel they are able to contribute to the Catholic life of the school (2014:2) and so a commitment to the faith and a visible contribution to parish/community life is essential. How is this addressed in Catholic schools today? Q7 governor responses explained presence at mass, celebration days, charitable events and parent evenings demonstrated their faith commitment to the school. The HT Interviews supported this view by confirming physical presence helped maintain a Catholic community feel.

The CES states, 'you **must** be a practising Catholic' (2014:2) if you wish to be a foundation Governor in a Catholic school. I agree physical presence by governor is fundamental at school events, however, is being a practising Catholic enough? The age demographic of Wellside School GB is forty-five years onward and so pre-Vatican II mentality may feature in some members. Their experience of Catholic education may not be the same as Catholic education in 2015. Even more so today, Catholic education seeks to educate young people who can "bear institutional witness for the church and its values, especially in the face of damaging and dangerous influences in society"<sup>11</sup>. How can governors ensure they are preserving the ethos not just

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<sup>11</sup> Vatican document, *The Catholic School* (1977:paragraph 53).

by practising their own faith? Governors need to use the language of our time to engage the youth of the faith.

### **5.6.2 The contribution to the school mission and development**

Q 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 addressed this aspect. As expected a 100% positive response for schools having a mission statement. Q6 had a positive response with all governors contributing to the creation of the school mission statement. This demonstrates governor connectedness with Catholic school life.

Q7 and Q8 gave respondents an opportunity to elaborate; governors explained how they helped create and monitor school ethos. Respondents outlined that clarity of vision to all stakeholders was important, also that school policies were sympathetic to Catholic values and, “preserving the catholicity of the school during the recruitment process”.

Monitoring of ethos was mainly conducted within the GSEF remit; governors welcomed the inclusion of Ethos into the GSEF – it allowed for time with SLT and helped forge positive professional relationships with key staff.

### **5.6.3 The Appropriateness of Training**

Q10 and 11 asked about the level attendance at Local Authority (LA) Governor training and Archdiocese Governor training. More governors attended the LA training than Archdiocesan training.

Q12 and 13 asked governors about the appropriateness of governor training either by the LA or the Archdiocese. Most governors felt training was beneficial and LA training helped as it improved the, “understanding of our role and responsibilities. Technical understanding e.g. FFT and Raise Online, finances” and it kept governors up-to-date with current legislation.

Respondents explained how, other than providing information to governors, training acted as reassurance that they were doing the right thing. This does not relate with HTA interview response whereby he stated there was some “mudding of the waters” regarding governor responsibility. If I conducted this study again I would enquire as to why there is this difference of opinion.

Furthermore, the Archdiocesan training was seen as an opportunity to meet other Catholic governors and create a network of expertise.

Notably, one response highlighted the decrease in Archdiocese training,

“It is a matter of regret that the diocese has in recent times provided less training, because the LEA does provide excellent training. However it is affirming to meet others regularly as a diocesan network of Catholics”

There is discrepancy between LA and Archdiocese training. Whilst training is generally well attended it was acknowledged that LA training was seen as more useful as it gave facts, figures and legislation – the “nitty-gritty” of governance. However, governors saw Archdiocese/Catholic training as vague – how can Catholic governor training become more robust and regularly attended?

#### **5.6.4 The Impact of Ofsted on the Role of Governor**

The support and challenge paradigm of governance is fundamental – effective governing bodies have a commitment to ask challenging questions. Catholic distinctiveness speaks of the need for quality relationships to exist in order for the Christian school community to flourish. Within the sacramental perspective there is a commitment to a vision of school leadership by participation; creating environments in which individuals feel empowered and enabled.

The role of the governor is pivotal is providing the appropriate amount of support and challenge to the head teacher. An understanding of this was

strongly displayed in the questionnaire response. It was stated that governors knew they held the head teacher to account but acknowledged the need to listen, enquire and offer their suggestions.

Governors overwhelmingly felt their role had changed significantly since the increased Ofsted scrutiny. Governors do feel more informed and more anxious about their role but recognise that working with the head teacher and leadership at all levels will contribute to whole school improvement.

### **5.7 Limitations of this Study**

As stated in the Methodology chapter the advantage of using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research strategies was to receive different types of information in order to gain a balanced opinion. Interviews would provide deeper responses whereas a questionnaire could offer numerical facts to quantify opinion.

The highest response rate was from Foundation Governors whereas no response was received from Parent Governors – I have gauged no understanding of whether Parent Governors understand the notion of ethos or indeed feel they contribute to the school development.

However, 40% constitutes a good response rate as Lydon states,

The response rate to the survey was 43.1% which, according to evidence produced by SuperSurvey<sup>1</sup> based on data deduced from 199 on-line surveys, is above the average of 41.21% in respect of sample sizes of less than 1000, in this case the sample size being 220 (2011:312).

Lastly, conducting research within the school you work is a limiting factor. I think some governors may have been reluctant to take part despite the confidentiality remit due to it being me.



## **5.8 Considerations for Future Research**

The outcomes from my interviews and findings from the questionnaires have assisted in answering the issues posed by the Literature Review; however, new issues have arisen from the research.

Firstly, this was not a truly representative study as only two head teachers from Catholic high schools were interviewed and only one governing body undertook a questionnaire; these factors limited the research.

From this study I would suggest the following further research opportunities:

- To compare Catholic high schools in different Ofsted categories. A possible comparison between a GB in a school in special measures and a Good school – how do they work to maintain Catholic Distinctiveness?
- To compare different levels of experience of Head teachers: does this impact upon the GB working relationships and understanding of role boundaries?
- To investigate the different levels of understanding of distinctiveness between governor roles (Foundation, Staff, LA etc.) and ways in which this could be refined.

## **Chapter 6 - Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The overall aim of this project was to examine the extent to which the governing body of a Catholic high school maintains the balance between Catholic Distinctiveness and school improvement.

To achieve this aim I firstly, within the Literature Review, explored the nature of Catholic Distinctiveness and how it manifests itself in Catholic leadership today. This was followed by a historical perspective on governance largely focusing upon the work of Dr Storr. Subsequently, I examined statutory guidance from DfE, NGA and CES to determine the role of governance and the accountability introduced. Next followed an explanation of what constitutes effective governance and what this means for Catholic high schools. From the Literature Review it transpired that Catholic Distinctiveness and school improvement are one and the same; that Ofsted is good for Catholic schools and the standards agenda dictated by central government mirrors the Catholic principles of the pursuit of excellence and dignity for every individual.

With this idea in mind, the Methodology chapter examined which research methods would be most appropriate to examine how governors understood the notion of Ethos and the role they played in preserving ethos in school in the light of school improvement measures.

Within the Analysis chapter it revealed that governors can confidently articulate ethos, albeit from a Foundation Governor perspective as they represented the majority of questionnaire response, and they considered their role as one which provided guidance, assistance and support.

It was clear that the Head teachers interviewed recognised that governance was an act of service and all respondents were committed to Catholic education; they were in no danger of being seduced by indicators of approval. In fact, they saw Ofsted as an opportunity to acknowledge that their work was pupil-centred.

## 6.2 Recommendations

In the light of the literature reviewed and the research conducted the following series of recommendations could be considered by the school, it's Governing Body and the Archdiocese to help the future of Catholic school leadership ensure the maintenance of Catholic Distinctiveness in Catholic high schools.

### 6.2.1 Recommendation 1: Training

If the agenda of self-improving schools and the accountability on school governance continues to grow then the requirement of purposeful investment into governor training needs to occur.

Responses from the governor's questionnaire implied that LA training was good but Archdiocesan training was not. If, as the Director of Education suggests, there is a *professionalization* of governance then Catholic governor training needs to become more robust.

I suggest training along the themes of;

- *Distinctive Nature of a Catholic School: Implications for School Governance* wherein governors can explore the historical perspective of Catholic education, in the light of Vatican II and how the sacramental perspective can be applied through their work.
- The Archdiocese can offer different themes of training;
  - *Data and Implications for Provision for the Disadvantaged in Catholic High Schools,*
  - *Catholic Leadership & The Role of the Governor*
  - *Completing an Ethos SEF*
  - *Exploring Spirituality in Catholic Schools*

I recommended some training may be delivered by the clergy or Archdiocesan staff but presentations from serving Head teachers and senior leaders alongside shared work-stories from governors would provide meaningful advice and guidance. In addition, to promote good attendance I suggest an annual Programme of Catholic Governor Training is published

and that the venues are evenly distributed across the Archdiocesan. Further, if training is hosted by different schools this may encourage ownership of training sessions and certainly provide opportunities for collaboration and partnership working.

The research confirmed that governors welcomed meeting other Catholic school governors. I recommend the creation of a *Archdiocesan Catholic Governor Network* which is self-led by governors; this would create the possibility to meet and share good practice.

### **6.2.2. Recommendation 2: Monitoring**

As well the articulation of ethos my other concern was how a school can keep the spirituality under review. It is a very difficult concept to measure and a Section 48 every 3 years (possibly even more now under new inspection guidelines from September 2015!) does not suffice.

It was acknowledged in the research that the GSEF is a strength; it promotes collaboration, helps develop strong professional relationships and provides focus in meetings. Including an *Ethos and Mission Section* within the GSEF would be recommended and I would suggest this is placed at the beginning and all other sections are derived from this. Regular updating of the GSEF is fundamental and ensures there is clear communication about the direction and mission of the school. I propose there be a *Link Governor: Ethos* who meets key staff (HT, Chaplain, Head of RE, Heads of Year) to discuss the Catholic dimension and regularly reports back to the Full Governing Body.

To ensure governance remains effective there needs to be the right balance of skills and rigorous quality assurance. Therefore, I recommend a regular *External Governor Review*. Audits can be conducted by the NGA, however, I suggest *Inter-School Governance Reviews* in which schools work in partnership to audit GB skills, understanding and knowledge rather than the self-skill audit presently being used. I feel this model mirrors the open leadership style favoured by Catholic schools, as Archbishop McMahon said, “we are stronger together”.

### 6.2.3 Recommendation 3: Recruitment and Retention

I recommend widening the net for recruitment of governors. There needs to be a recruitment drive not only through local parishes or the Episcopal Vicar but in schools, hospitals and businesses. Who leads on Catholic school governor recruitment? Is there capacity in our Archdiocese to appoint a *Governor Recruitment Officer* and create a recruitment/retention action plan? Furthermore, governor recruitment needs to have “Life Catholics” as well as practising Catholics – merely practising your faith does not make you an effective governor.

I propose considering a *Rotational Programme for Governance* whereby governing bodies or the Chair/Vice-chair move around schools on a 3 year cycle. This would have the following impact;

- Avoid any factions of governance occurring
- Ensure the skill-sets of governors are evenly distributed across the Archdiocese
- Provide a wealth of different governor experiences in different types of school
- Consolidate governor retention by offering different school experiences on a rolling programme (‘fresh set of eyes mentality’)

### 6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, research shows that governors in Catholic high schools view the increased scrutiny placed upon them as a positive step. Despite increased accountability, governors can articulate and demonstrate Catholic Distinctiveness and strive to maintain the balance between the external pressure of school improvement and the right to a faith education. This is achieved through physical presence, a challenging yet supportive attitude to head teacher’s role and the GSEF.

If governors are mindful of the following then maintaining the balance between school improvement and Catholic Distinctiveness is not a challenge but an opportunity,

**Collaboration:** Practise open leadership, honest data sharing and adopt an optimistic approach to school development.

**Community:** Catholic schools are faith communities in which each individual is made in the image of Christ. Demonstrate a sharing and self-less approach, be involved with and promote parish/school/home links. Always value the power of strong relationships.

**Challenge:** Create opportunities which offer challenge for pupils in order to their best/reach potential; Catholic schools have a duty to serve the, “least, the lost and the last”.<sup>12</sup> Provide challenge for all levels of leadership in school, in doing so, individuals feel enabled and empowered. Create a climate where trusting abandonment (Lydon 2014:2.8) is the norm and therefore the ability to take risks builds capacity and transforms hearts.

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<sup>12</sup> Father James O’Keefe, Episcopal Vicar of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle (in a speech to Catholic Secondary Head Teacher at CATSCE Conference in 2011) cited in Module 1 CSL Booklet p1.11)

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